

ZULMA.

1929.

“ZULMA”

A Story of the Old South.

BY

MARY FRANCES SEIBERT.

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1897.


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BY

MARY FRANCES SEIBERT.

TO
MY BELOVED FATHER,
THIS LITTLE BOOK IS DEDICATED
AS A TRIBUTE OF LOVE
BY HIS AFFECTIONATE DAUGHTER,
MARY F. SEIBERT.

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INTRODUCTION.

IN introducing "Zulma, a Story of the Old South," to the reading public, I believe that in this day of progress and despite the influence of its so-called realistic literature, there are still some who care to pause now and then and cast a backward glance at those institutions laid low by Time, the arch-iconoclast.

Whatever view may be taken of that problem of the South, proposed at Sumpter and solved by Lee's surrender, the writer of romance must derive from the old conditions an ever fruitful field of labor, the philosopher, a pregnant theme of thought.

Personal knowledge of the incidents interwoven with her story—Miss Seibert having resided in Louisiana during the most vital epoch through which this section has passed—has suggested to the author the work of which this volume is the issue. And while the voice of "Topsy" is lifted up in the land proclaiming only the "seamy" side of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," it is not unfit even at this later date, that a "Zulma" be heard in turn and allowed to tell us in her homely way of the kindly, almost paternal relations that existed between master and slave on the old Grosse Tete plantations.

Finally, I would say that the book must prove its own *raison d'être*. Literature, like wine, needs no gaudy label; its own "*bouquet*" must testify unto its worth.

Bespeaking for the book the fair mindedness which we are wont to claim as our *fin de siècle* virtue,¹ I commend this "Story of the Old South" to the courtesy of its homeland press.

IRWIN HUNTINGTON.

Natchez, Miss., March 1, 1897.

“ZULMA.”

CHAPTER I.

RETROSPECTIONS.

A FEW miles southward from the old town of Waterloo, in the parish of Pointe Coupee, La., a lovely river winds its way through fertile lands, and clasps in its limpid embrace, an island of almost tropical beauty. Standing on the opposite shore, one watches with unwearied delight, the shifting phases of the landscape reflected on the glassy surface of the river-lake. It is a snare for the azure of the sky, and the wandering clouds by day, and the playgrounds of the moonbeams by night. The quaint habitations of the islanders nestle among luxuriant orchards and superb trees like villas on the Larian Lakes; and everywhere, along the green banks, the Cherokee spreads and glorifies the land with the light of its golden heart.

Farther down, beyond the shadows of the tall pecan trees, ancient willows and cotton woods dip their straggling roots among the yellow blossoms of the American lotus.

Sometimes, a pirogue is seen anchored among the lily-pads, where countless flowers lift up their royal heads to greet the matin rays of the sun. The craft sways gently over the dimpling waves and the angler jerks in quick succession the silver-scaled beauties from their canopied retreat.

All along the shores, cattle are seen standing in pellucid pastures, munching the succulent weeds which abound in the shallow water. The sight is a delightful feature in the aspect of the river; it harmonizes with the whole and enhances the beauty of the landscape.

The sunsets, viewed from different points, are gorgeous beyond description; carmine and amber glow and shift across the water until the grey of twilight falls with spectral lustre over the scene.

At night, the distant outlines of wood and shore, form a weird contrast with the moonlight skimming on the waves; and the fugitive light of the stars, dives into its throbbing depths like spirits falling from among the heavenly hosts.

But this placid beauty of land and water has but lately succeeded to a wilder and grander prospect.

Years ago, before the cut-offs had been made at Waterloo and Hermitage, False River was the actual bed of the Mississippi river; and that mighty stream, with its swift current and turbid waters, here made a *détour* on its passage to the gulf. It was through this channel that La Salle and his bold followers, passed on their voyage of discovery; Bienville and his gallant brothers gazed on the wild scenery, Spanish adventurers with their country's standards waving on the breeze, awoke the echoes of its primeval forests, and with their shotguns, startled the deer from his Cherokee thicket. And later still, after Louisiana had been ceded to the United States, and settlements had sprung up in various parts of the country, Western traders floated their barges down around its picturesque shores. Sloops and schooners sailed from New Orleans with tropical cargoes which they bartered for the natural products of the country.

Such had been the condition of this section before False River was divorced, from that stupendous water system which now drains the richest and most important region of the Union.

During the administration of Governor Bienville, permission was given to a set of pioneers to dig a canal from the upper to the lower ends of this bend in the river. The distance across being only three miles, it required but a short period of years, for the scouring waters to divert themselves from the natural to the artificial channel. The old bed was then diked at both ends leaving an isolated body of water, now known as False River.

Previous to this change, this territory was in possession of the French, who had overrun the country, raised forts and planted colonies in the most advantageous situations. A fort and chapel had been erected on the west bank of the Mississippi river a couple of leagues from the scene already described.

Its successor, the old Saint Francis Church, was built in 1765 at a period when the ancestors of those figuring in this story, held a prominent place among the early settlers.

A few years previous to the transfer of Louisiana to Spain, a Frenchman by the name of Lafitte, established himself here, on the picturesque bank of False River. This was shortly after the act of free navigation of the Mississippi had been secured by a treaty between the United States and Spain.

Mr. Lafitte acquired a considerable amount of wealth, not only by the sale of his home products, but by a judicious mode of trafficking with the Indians dispersed around the country.

Monsieur Lafitte, usually styled "*le bourgeois*," was a very popular man among the Creoles. He and his four manly sons were of a social disposition, delighting in the chase and reckless adventures; their place was in consequence, the rendezvous of all the jovial characters of the neighborhood.

The Lafitte residence, though lacking in elegance, was considered spacious and commodious. Its hipped-roof, mud-daubed walls and deep galleries made the characteristics of all Creole houses at that period—a style, though fallen in desuetude, still seen in the old domiciles which have escaped the ravages of time, and now stand as landmarks to the coming generation.

This capacious edifice stood prominent in the midst of a broad meadow where droves of horses and cattle led a life of pleasantness beneath the shade of oaks, grey with the moss of a century's growth.

A pair of antlered horns surmounted the posts of the front gate—from which circumstance the place derives its name; "*Corne à Cerreuil*" (deer-horn plantation.)

These trophies bear evidence of the family's taste for field sports; in truth, to this overpowering passion for the hounds and chase, may be attributed the losses which, in the course of time jeopardized their property.

Once fallen into thriftless and extravagant habits, they neglected their business, before, so absorbing and lucrative. As years rolled on, the place ceased to yield an income and the family began the struggle against accumulating debts. Then, a great sorrow darkened the doors of "*la maison de plaisance*," as the Lafittes loved to call their home.

One summer afternoon, the aged father, who was taking his accustomed nap on the cool gallery, was suddenly aroused by the bearers of cruel tidings. Eugene, his first-born, had been snatched from life in the prime of his manhood. That very morning, he had left home with gay companions laughing and jesting, little dreaming of the tragic death which awaited him, though for the hundredth time, it had been predicted on account of his reckless management of horses. They laid his

bruised body upon his bed, and the wretched father, in agony of grief, fell senseless upon the remains of him who had been his pride and best beloved. He refused all consolation, and so wrapped himself in his sorrow that his health and energies collapsed as by the effect of some overpowering malady. When death claimed him as the next victim of that household, he yielded up his life without a struggle.

In less than a month after Mr. Lafitte's demise, the youngest of the family, a youth gay, handsome and generous-hearted, succumbed to a malignant fever, aggravated by grief and despondency.

Jean Baptiste and Edmond Lafitte returned from their brother's burial with hearts oppressed with discouragement. The sight of their deserted home awakened a thousand recollections which rushed upon their minds like phantoms loosened from some dismal abode. The brothers turned hastily away, as if to escape the pain so cruelly thrust upon them. They wandered aimlessly across the fields in the direction of a strip of woods, once the hunters' rendezvous. This familiar spot, associated with the happy, careless past, again re-opened the floodgates of sad retrospections, and Edmond, the younger of the two, threw himself in one of the rustic seats beneath the trees, and burst into a passionate fit of weeping. Jean Baptiste with arms folded across his sturdy breast leaned against the trunk of an oak and silently contemplated his brother's emotion. His expression grew hard and cold and his lips compressed with the efforts he made to control his own feelings.

Little by little, his brother's sobs subsided, he lifted his eyes and listlessly watched the gambols of a red squirrel in the branches above him.

Dull apathy had succeeded to the wild, uncontrollable anguish which had wrung his heart, a moment before.

Every faculty of his intelligence, every natural emotion, seemed paralyzed and his senses no longer grasped the full measure of his afflictions.

Jean Baptiste quietly took a seat beside his brother and laid his hand affectionately upon his arm, saying: "*Tu es le suel lien qui m'attache à la terre, cher frère!*" Then, followed a conscious pause—a silence more emphatic than words. But the spell was brief; their mutual sorrow, poignant sympathy and discouragement demanded expression, and they talked long and sadly of the ones who had been so suddenly removed from life—and of their own bereavement and forlorn condition.

Their father had died insolvent; the estate was heavily mortgaged. Jean Baptiste touched feelingly upon the subject, signifying his desire to remain on the place and pay off the debts. Edmond decidedly refused to adopt his brother's plans. "We are homeless and penniless" he said; "the wisest course for us to pursue, is to deliver up the property and leave the country. A man thrown on his own resources, has a better chance among strangers—far from associations which will only tend to weaken his purpose and disqualify him for earnest work."

An unwonted light leaped into the moistened eye of Jean Baptiste; his lips quivered with suppressed emotion.

"Abandon the old home!" he exclaimed with warmth; "the spot sacred to me by a thousand recollections? *Never*, brother, *never!* This heritage bequeathed to us by the hand of misfortune, shall never fall to the lot of strangers! I shall devote my life's labor to save it from desecration. You will abandon me—well—the struggle will be harder, but the prospect does not alarm me; I will fight life's battle alone."

"Let us dismiss the subject from our minds," answered Edmond after a moment's painful reflection, "at least, until

after we have resigned ourselves to the inevitable. "Come, brother!" he continued, rising from his seat—"there is no escape from the ordeal before us——the desolation which awaits us at home."

Jean Baptiste silently followed his brother through the long evening shadows, his eyes full of unshed tears, searched for, though dreading to catch the first glimpse of their lonely home. It emerged from a grove of catalpa trees; the dying rays of the setting sun fell athwart their young, uplifted branches and cast a faint glow against the gable end of the building.

At their approach, half a dozen hounds scampered down the gallery steps, yelping in doeful chorus, A flock of pigeons whirled on restless wings about the barn; they clamored for the accustomed feed often distributed to them by hands now cold in the stony clasp of death.

The unhappy brothers, dreading to pass the threshold of their deserted home, loitered about the place, mechanically performing their farm work. After dusk, they sat on the gallery until the moon arose and bridged with gold the undulating waves of the river. Climbing over the trees, she looked down with milder radiance upon the bereaved ones, and flooded with light, the *three vacant chairs* beside them.

In the course of time, settlements were made and the wishes of both brothers were realized. Edmond made a surrender of his rights and left the country. Jean Baptiste assumed the debts and entered his new career. His life of ease and indolence, was exchanged for one of tireless labor and privation. At the end of fifteen years, he found himself sole owner of the "*Corne à Chevreuil*" plantation. The better part of his life had been spent in accomplishing his purpose. He had denied himself every pleasure, even the most legitimate or such as the mind derives from nature without the expenditure of time and labor.

He then brought to its solitude, a sweet-faced woman, who had faithfully loved him throughout his struggles. During the waiting, the charms and graces of youth had vanished; for both had passed the prime of life. But their wedding day dawned upon their heads with subdued happiness.

The wife's gentle presence in that great, rambling house, contributed much towards dissipating the gloom which had for so long pervaded its atmosphere; and the cloud of tender melancholy under which they had been wedded, vanished like mist under the benign influence of the sun.

On a bright morning in June; while the mocking birds vied with each other in thrilling concerts, Jean Baptiste Lafitte, with an undefinable expression on his countenance, walked with elastic steps, the length of his broad gallery. Now and then, he paused to listen to the merry warblers; the melody of their singing had never before entered his soul. On glancing at the river, he noticed how the waves sparkled in the sunlight; he even contrasted the verdant banks and peaceful scenery on the opposite shore, with the intense blue of the water.

Why was he idle on that day, and what caused the strange workings of a mind hitherto insensible to the beauties of nature?

Within a darkened chamber of the old home, two bright eyes strove for the first time to pierce its obscurity—eyes destined to dispel the last lingering regrets for a wasted youth, and to cheer and brighten up the remaining years of the lonely couple. The coming of the baby was the crowning event of their life. Day by day, they watched with increasing wonder and happiness the unfolding beauty and mental qualities of the child.

At the age of fourteen, she was sent to the Sacred Heart Convent, then the most prominent female school in the State. She acquired accomplishments which added considerably to her natural advantages.

Her fond parents and former companions looked upon her as a prodigy; but Elise never made a display of her superior knowledge. The sweetness of her disposition and the artless graciousness of her manners, won her the friendship of all who approached her. Her beauty was of that unobtrusive sort which improves under scrutiny. There was a lack of brilliancy about her general appearance; but all watched with pleasure, the timid glances of her dark eyes and the sweet, winning smile which parted her red lips.

One of the events on False River, at this particular period, was a "king ball." This was an affair in which any gentleman willing to assist in defraying expenses, was entitled to the privilege of choosing his "queen." The maiden whom he thus invested with regal honors, usually received his undivided attentions during the ball. From time to time, Elise Lafitte graced with her presence these popular gatherings. On such occasions, the boldest and handsomest of "cavaliers" competed for the honor of crowning her fair brow with roses. It was at one of these balls, that a distinguished looking stranger first formed her acquaintance. The fact of meeting in this community, a creole who spoke the English language, gave him unexpected pleasure, as well as an excuse for lingering at her side—much to the annoyance of older admirers. Her musical voice, enhanced by her sweet French accent, charmed him. The calm dignity of her beauty and other winning graces, captivated his heart.

And she who had so often turned a deaf ear to the pleadings of the Creole boys, listened to the "American's" love story and found herself vanquished by the thrilling glances of his dark-blue eyes,

Arthur Hunt was a Virginian by birth; he came from an old aristocratic family who had lost their wealth by injudicious management. Being of a venturesome turn of mind, he launched out at an early age to seek his fortune. Time and tide drifted him to this romantic part of the parish and its

quaint population. He was of a genial disposition and extremely clever; consequently, was much liked by the Creole families.

His frank, charming manners rendered him a great favorite among the ladies; though he did not always inspire the same friendly feelings in the hearts of the younger men of the country.

The air of ease and unstudied elegance with which he carried himself, his tone of confidence and self-possession, often subjected him to unpleasant experiences. The young men looked upon him as an interloper and dangerous rival, and somewhat resented the ready and indisputable manner in which he was received and lionized by the prominent families of the community. This circumstance only stimulated him to increase his popularity among the better class, and to render himself truly worthy of their respect and friendship.

With a little assistance, he started in a mercantile enterprise. There were few stores in the country at that time, and every merchant endowed with the least business capacity held the nucleus of a fortune.

Mr. Hunt's unprecedented success, emboldened him to ask for the hand of the woman he loved. When he presented himself for permission to address their daughter, the old couple made but faint resistance. They recalled their own prolonged courtship and wasted youth, and yielded without demur, their heart's treasure, to the bold and handsome suitor, who, in every respect, seemed worthy of the prize to which he aspired. The wedding took place in the old home where the numerous friends and admirers of the happy pair flocked to offer their congratulations.

Mr. Hunt took his lovely bride to an attractive and comfortable cottage he had prepared for her reception, half a dozen miles from her paternal roof.

After their daughter's marriage, Mr. Lafitte and his gentle wife, once more, subsided into their accustomed ways.

The grave, weather-beaten husband pursued his life of toil and his faithful companion plodded by his side, as industrious and economical as though they still depended on their daily labor for their livelihood.

CHAPTER II.

AWAY TO THE WOODS !

A QUARTER of a century prior to the Confederate war, False River and the adjacent country, formed the most interesting region in Louisiana.

It was famous for its genial and salubrious climate, for the fertility of its soil and for the value and variety of its forest trees. Bayous, alive with the finest fish, intersected the country and diversified its scenery. Many of the planters were immensely wealthy and owned plantations which extended several miles along the river front. Here, primitive homes were seen through vistas of live oaks, catalpas and china trees. Here, the people lived on the abundant fruit of their labor, undisturbed and oblivious of the agitations and progress of modern life.

None enjoyed tranquility more; none dispensed more liberal hospitality when occasion required. No wonder strangers tarried in their midst, and when away, longed, once more, to taste of the magic waters of False River.

But the country was not without its disadvantages. The Mississippi river, at certain seasons of the year, became a source of expense and annoyance to the population living behind the levees. For a long period, especially during the French and the Spanish rule, levees had been kept up by the front proprietors, though in time of danger, planters occupying alluvial lands back of the river, were required to lend assistance. But in 1849, Congress passed an act, donating to Louisiana, the swamps and lowlands subject to overflows. This concession was made in order to encourage the people to purchase the lands and aid in the construction of these costly embankments.

Previous to this, the work done on the levees, was so inadequate and defective, that no reliance could be placed on them.

Year after year, they succumbed to the overwhelming waters and disastrous overflows spread over a wide extent of territory. The front lands along False River escaped these inundations, but thousands of acres which rivaled in fertility, the fruitful valley of the Nile, lay idle in consequence of this impending danger.

The Grosse Tete country was then a trackless wilderness; its virgin soil, rich beyond description, needed but the plow-share and seed to burst into fecundity. Hitherto, its only paths had been made by wild beasts and cattle roaming in search of food. The Indian and the hunter were the only human beings who had traversed them or built camp-fires in the midst of its luxuriance.

But after the levees had been strengthened and enlarged, the enterprising lost no time in seizing opportunities which they knew would open to them a wide avenue to future wealth.

People from all parts of the parish turned with longing hearts to this Land of Promise.

The labor of leveling the forests when once begun, was prosecuted with incredible zeal and expedition.

Within a few years, passable roads were made across the country and the most enterprising adventurers had reared primitive dwellings among the stumps on the freshly cleared lands.

From the east bank of the Mississippi, from the tired old hills, the people came and cast their lots with those who had ventured nearer home. On False River, that region of romance and ethereal loveliness, merchants and planters disposed of their property to invest in Grosse Tete lands. The glowing accounts the new settlers gave of life in the backwoods; the

spontaneous growth of the crops and their marvelous yields; the abundance of fish, of game; the fine pasturage and numerous other advantages, induced Mr. Hunt to give up merchandizing in order to launch in this new enterprise. He bought nearly a thousand acres of this public land and began clearing that portion of it fronting bayou Grosse Tete. In less than nine months, the stalwart force he had put to work, had cleared and prepared for cultivation a hundred acres of the richest land in the valley of the Mississippi; and a year after the purchase, a dozen substantial buildings had been erected among the blackened stumps and cane stubbles. At some distance from the precipitous bank of the bayou, stood a cabin, larger and more commodious than those destined for the slaves ; it was a temporary dwelling for the master's family. Mr Hunt remained on the place to superintend the work, and was, for many months, the sole occupant of this lonely abode. He had confided his wife and child to the care of the old people at "*Corne à Cheveruil*."

In the meantime, he hastened the arrangements for their reception; he could no longer endure life without their companionship.

The day of their departure for Grosse Tete, fell on a warm, serene morning in the month of December, such a December as dawns in Louisiana, when a balmy fall, with its genial train, precipitates itself into the arms of winter. For a fortnight, the south winds had been gamboling over the freshly carpeted earth, and the mellow rays of the sun had weaved their golden shreds about the leafless branches of the trees. The mocking birds returned to their haunts, and reopened their musical career. All day the robins and sparrows chattered unmindful of their comrades, that from time to time, toppled over, ignominious strangled with china balls.

During the last week of her sojourn at the old home, Mrs. Hunt found a melancholy pleasure in watching from the gallery, the reflection of the moon on False River. She confessed that she had never before adequately appreciated the splendor of the spectacle until the time came to leave this familiar scene of her youth.

Her little daughter, Lucile, then scarcely five years old, was a remarkably interesting and intelligent child. She had inherited her father's fine complexion and dark-blue eyes, and her mother's beautiful mouth. Her face was exquisitely moulded and the loveliest of dimples played hide-and-seek on her dainty chin. Lucile had become the idol of her grandparents, and the thought of separation grieved them sorely. It was pitiful to witness their distress on the day of her departure for Grosse Tete. They clung to her till the last moment, calling her by the most endearing names their love suggested. "*Chere coeur*," "*bijou*," "*bien aimee*," were a few, among the affectionate terms they bestowed upon her, as Mrs. Hunt, with a dull, aching pain at her heart, withdrew the child from their detaining arms.

Mr. Hunt sent Dave, the trusty driver, after his wife and child; he himself stayed to prepare for their reception and to extend to them, the welcome they so richly deserved. He knew that the anticipations of this meeting, would, in a great measure, assuage the pain of the separation with the lonely old people and perhaps, divert their minds from the dreary, and uninviting part of the country through which they would pass, on their homeward journey.

The long ride, through the woods and canebrakes, was fatiguing and monotonous to Mrs. Hunt, but it was an enjoyable one to Lucile, who often amused her mother with her cute observations. During one of her silent spells, Mrs. Hunt watched with affectionate interest, the puzzled expression of the child's lively countenance.

"Does my baby find the trees and bushes pretty?" she asked, toying with the bright ringlets escaped from the crimson hood. "I'm looking at the long ropes, God ties the trees with," answered Lucile, casting a solemn look on her mother.

"Ropes!" exclaimed the lady, laughing. "Why, darling, those are muscadine vines."

After due reflection, Lucile came to the conclusion that Uncle Dave had lost his way and insisted on his taking them back to her grandparents.

"Too late fur to go back now," replied the old man, turning to cast a look on the wistful face. "Don't you be skeered; I's takin you straight ter yo' paw an' dem rabbits he got fur you."

Lucile rallied after this encouraging promise, and at every settlement, strained her lovely eyes, trying to catch a glimpse of her father. She was too full of pleasant anticipations to make any further remarks. But when they reached the bank of Grosse Tete, she stood up in the carriage and leaned out of the window to watch the alligators swimming across the bayou, and the grey turtles sunning themselves on the logs. At last, oh joy! she beheld her father crossing a lot and walking with rapid strides towards the road. How handsome he looked, standing upon the style, bareheaded, flushed with happiness and frantically wafting them a welcome!

"O papa!" cried Lucile, throwing herself into his outstretched arms. "I've brought you a basket of tomatoes and ever so many pretty flowers!"

"Bless your precious heart!" exclaimed Mr. Hunt kissing her red lips. "Is it summer time out on False River?"

"I—' spect so, papa," answered Lucile gazing around on the dreary scenery, but it's winter out here, aint it?"

Mr. Hunt gave no answer to the child's question, but drew his wife to his bosom, saying:

"You are a thousand times welcome, darling. How I thank you for coming!"

Uncle Dave, the silent spectator of this joyful meeting and re-union of loving hearts, chuckled with inward satisfaction as he slowly gathered up the reins to drive through the bars.

The little family crossed the rustic stile and stepped into an enclosure, where felled timber and cane stubbles were among the prominent features of the place.

The humble dwelling, which, for coming years, was to be their home, was built of rough weather-boarding, without ornaments of any sort, save a coat of whitewash. A chimney of hospitable proportions flanked one end of the cabin; two small windows were the only openings at the other. In the rear of the building, was a bayou of considerable size, fringed with rank undergrowth. Old cypress trees grew in its bed and lifted their gaunt, moss-laden branches high above the thickets and smooth limbed sapplings. The aspect was cheerless even in the adorning light of a mid-day sun, and Mrs. Hunt made strenuous efforts to conceal her disappointment and overcome the feeling of despondency which was gradually overpowering her senses.

On perceiving her emotion, her husband passed his arm around her slender waist. "It will not be thus, always; dearest," he said in a low voice. "Bear it for awhile, for my sake, Elise."

She raised towards him her tearful, reproachful eyes. "O Arthur, you misjudge me! With you, any place on earth is paradise to me!"

Mr. Hunt drew her close to his heart and tenderly kissed her. "Heaven knows how deeply I appreciate the sacrifice you have made for me, dear Elise. My life's devotion shall repay it!"

The happy couple followed the heedless child who bounded before them in the direction of the cabin-home, where her papa had informed her, she would find the rabbits.

CHAPTER III.

PIONEERING.

OUR pioneers soon became accustomed to their lonely, unattractive home and reconciled to the many privations entailed on them by reason of the distance which separated them from the social world.

Mrs. Hunt did not adapt herself as readily to her surroundings as Lucile did.

The new life proved very congenial to the child's nature. She loved to roam over the place, among the bushes and trailing vines where "lived the frolicsome squirrels and rabbits." Many a time she came to her mother with interesting descriptions of the snakes she had seen dangling from the thickets, or found beautifully coiled in the wagon track. On fine days, she was allowed to accompany her father to the field, where she spent her time diligently hunting for water lilies for her mother, or watching the hands at work.

She would stand on the headlands and watch, with childish delight, the gleaming plow-shares cutting into the earth and upturning in undulant furrows, the rich, mellow soil.

The plantation was intersected by numerous bayous, which by the way, served the purpose of drainage; whenever she wished to go across any of these, one of the hands placed her on his shoulder and carried her over. The honor was generally conferred upon Jonas, a jovial hearted fellow, who was always but too glad to drop his hoe for a few minutes' frolic.

With Lucile comfortably perched on his back, he would caper around in imitation of an unmanageable horse. These manœuvres always delighted the child; her mirth and ringing laughter only served to emulate the darkie to further alarming demonstrations.

No matter how pressing the work, Mr. Hunt never interfered with Lucile's amusements. One morning in spring, the first she spent on the place, she started off as usual, on one of her rambles to meet her father. As was her wont, she called upon Jonas to carry her across one of the bayous.

"Now, you grab hold as tight as you kin, little misses," said Jonas falling on his knees and throwing off his old slouch hat, "for dis yere lawse, he got de debil in 'im dis morning."

After an unusual display of equestrian feats, such as pitching, rearing and snorting, Jonas leaped on the opposite bank and collapsed on all fours.

"Clum off, little misses," he said, puffing and blowing. "Clum off, I say. Dis here lawse dun cross ober dat ribber."

Lucile clutched the tighter to his wooly locks and strenuously refused to dismount.

"Git off, chile," he continued, giving her a vigorous shake, and rolling his eyeballs in protest. "Dis yere animal dun win-broke; sides dat, he got his row to hoe."

But his appeal was in vain; Lucile shook with decision her shining curls.

"I shant get off, Jonas, till you uncross that bayou!"

"Lawd, heve mercy 'pon my soul," cried Jonas, casting an eye across the cut where a cloud of dust indicated the progress of his squad; "she's clutchin' on ter me reg'ler as a tick, and how she's gwine to be took off, is more'n den I kin tell."

Unmindful of his distress, Lucile secured a firmer hold of the slave's natty hair and tugged at it with unflagging determination. "Get-along! Get-along!" she cried, beating her tiny heels against his lusty chest. Seeing no chance for respite, the unfortunate Jonas recommenced his equine exploits.

After a repetition of frantic vaults and feints to over-

throw his tireless rider, the complaisant slave, once more dropped on his knees. "Dere!" he exclaimed, wiping with his sleeve the great drops of perspiration which trickled down his ebony cheeks. "I's gwine to ketch a lickin' sho!"

"But didn't we have fun though?" asked Lucile brushing back the tangled hair from her laughing eyes.

"You dun troo wid yo' fun little missus. When you hears me hollowin' ober dere, you can be satisfied; I's gittin' mine."

"Who are you going to ride Jonas?" asked she with some misgiving in her voice.

"Who?" exclaimed he, staring significantly into her questioning eyes. "It's Uncle Dave gwine to ride *me*. Didn't I tell ye I's gwine to ketch a lickin'."

Just at this moment, Lucile spied her father walking rapidly across the cut.

"O papa!" she cried, running to meet him, "Jonas had to cross me over the bayou and he won't catch a lickin', will he?"

Mr. Hunt pretended to examine the case with due consideration. "I shall turn him over to Uncle Dave," he answered, with solemn gravity.

Such a decision set Jonas to a vigorous scratching of his pate.

"She made me do it, marster; 'sisted on me crossin' an' uncrossin' dat er bayou."

"Indeed, I did," cried Lucile, coming to his rescue.

"Very well, Jonas," replied his master, you certainly had to obey the orders of your little mistress. "Tell Uncle Dave I say it's all right."

The light-hearted negro dropped to the ground, turned a somersault and gave a whoop which the woods flung back in wild echoes.

Life was not altogether cheerless to the inmates of the little cabin home. During the course of summer, they entertained many friends and relatives from "*le sol natif*." The place appeared to visitors like a God-forsaken wilderness; its proximity to the woods increased its dreariness of aspect. They missed the dusty highway and the lovely sheet of water their eyes were accustomed to rest upon.

It was with pardonable pride that Mr. Hunt piloted his friends through the broad acres under cultivation.

The old planters of False River, who were accustomed to a rigid and undeviating mode of management, were staggered at his loose experiments and the success which crowned them.

The generous soil yielded such abundant crops, that there was always a surplus of farm-truck on the plantation.

There was no finer country for stock; they throve and multiplied in magnificent canebrakes, which Mr. Hunt enclosed for pasturage. And many were the pounds of delicious butter turned from the churn in the little dairy-house beneath the oaks.

Grosse Tete melons were proverbial for their flavor and extraordinary size. The negroes on the place had full run of the patch as well as the orchard, wherein, all summer, they feasted on luscious peaches.

Mr. Hunt encouraged his slaves to cultivate their own gardens and potato patches, and to raise chickens. Hence, it was no unusual custom for the women to place before their families, a tempting omelet or a bowl of fragrant *gombo-fili* with the more substantial hunk of pork or bacon.

One summer evening the Hunt family were seated on their little gallery enjoying the moonlight and listening to the soft rustle of leaves in the neighboring trees when they were suddenly startled by a loud, blood-curdling shriek which proceeded from a group of bearded oaks, on the banks of the bayou.

Lucile started from her comfortable attitude on her father's knee, and looking up into his face, said, smiling:

"I'm not afraid of owls now papa."

"You were silly to be afraid of them before, Birdie." "Once upon a time, you were under the impression that they craved as much for a little girl like you for a supper as they did for one of your mamma's fat chickens."

"Indeed I did; and when I heard them crying like that one, I used to cover up my head and say a prayer."

"Hush!—listen!" exclaimed Mrs. Hunt, laying her hand on her child's head.

"How exquisite!" said her husband.

"Who is singing, mamma?"

"How can I tell? One would think Jennie Lind was serenading the darkies."

The voice which had arrested Mrs. Hunt's attention, proceeded from the negro quarters. It was a powerful, but flute-like soprano. The clear, pure notes seemed to drop from the singer's lips like a shower of pearls.

The air, "Les Roses," was a familiar one to Mrs. Hunt, and it was rendered with charming melody and precision.

When, at last, the brilliant notes died away in the stillness of night, the melody of it still lingered on the ears of those it had fascinated.

"Who can it be?" Mrs. Hunt asked of her husband. "That was the most beautiful voice I ever heard."

"May be it was an angel singing" suggested Lucile.

"It would be ridiculous for an angel to sing a waltz-song, would it not dear?" answered her father.

His curiosity was aroused, however, and he went to the quarters to ascertain who was the extraordinary singer.

When he returned, there was a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"Well, who is the prima-dona?" asked Mrs. Hunt.

"Teli us quick, papa, did you really see her?" asked Lucile.

"I was permitted to gaze upon the light of her countenance."

"Was she very beautiful?" inquired Lucile, with eagerness.

"She is as black as the ace of spades."

"One of our women?" asked Mrs. Hunt.

"Yes; it was Zulma, the girl I bought at old Landry's sale, yesterday."

"Why, she has a glorious voice, Arthur. What shall we do with a slave endowed with such a gift?"

"I gave fifteen hundred dollars for her; she promises to make a splendid field-hand."

"I wish you would send her to me to-morrow morning. I am anxious to see her."

"Not with the intention of spoiling her, I hope. Elise?"

"Give me credit for having more common sense, dear husband," replied Mrs. Hunt rising. "Lucile, kiss your papa good night; it is bedtime."

Immediately after breakfast, the following morning, Zulma walked up to the house and planted herself in the back door of the dining-room. Naturally, Mrs. Hunt had formed her ideas of the appearance of the sweet singer, but the reality fell so short of the ideal, that it was with a mental effort she overcame her surprise. She expected to see a full grown girl, with a serious mouth and eyes, restless with the fire of pent up genius; the girl who stood before her, though nearly sixteen years of age, was small, plump, but as straight as an arrow. She was quick and lithesome in her movements, and held up her head with an air of independence, which Mrs. Hunt thought quite unbecoming for one in her station. Her lips,

whence had flowed the pearly notes of the waltz-song, were uncommonly well-shaped, for one of her color. When she smiled, a set of faultless teeth gleamed behind them. Her eyes twinkled with intelligence.

"Well, Zulma, how do you like the place?" asked her mistress with a kindly smile.

"Putty wile sort of a place fur me," replied Zulma, in no very amiable mood.

"You seemed to be enjoying yourself last night, we heard you singing."

"I sings mos' all de time."

"Indeed! Who taught you the songs you sang last night?"

"I cotch 'em from my little mistis."

"Some of these evenings, you must come and sing for Lucile."

A broad grin overspread Zulma's features.

"Dat little gal over dere, ma'am?" asked she, nodding in the direction where Lucile stood.

"Yes, that's your little mistress: you must not call her 'gal' again."

"No'em, I won't;" replied Zulma, gazing admiringly on her young mistress.

"She's a pooty gal!" The words fell inadvertently from her lips; she started and glanced timidly at Mrs. Hunt who pretended to ignore the mishap.

"Have you eaten your breakfast?" she asked kindly.

"Dere it;" resposned the girl, tapping the tin bucket which hung on her arm.

"But ham and buttered biscuits are nicer than what you have here" said Lucile, uncovering her bucket.

"Look, mamma, only fried meat and corn dodgers. Shall I give her an egg too?"

"One day's indulgence will not spoil her, I hope. Offer her a cup of coffee, Lucile," added Mrs. Hunt smiling.

After Zulma had drank her coffee, Mrs. Hunt said to her:

"I shall not keep you here longer, child, Uncle Dave might not like it.

"Who dat, you calls unkle Daye?"

"One of the hands—an overseer; he keeps the others straight during your master's absence."

"Sakes! I knows he goin' to skin me."

"Not if you do your work right and obey orders."

"I don't speck it'll make much difrunce dough; my po back dun use to cowhide."

"Perhaps, you do not know, that you have the best and kindest of masters?"

"Dey tells me so."

"Then, I hope you will behave yourself so well, as never to need a whipping."

Zulma turned upon her mistress with an incredulous stare, then burst into laughter; but it was a sort of a nervous hilarity which she quickly subdued. "I's gwine to do my bes'," she said, with a scared look, "an' I aint gwine to run off, eider, if I kin hep it."

"You will not improve your condition by running off, Zulma; and that is one thing the people on this place never do. It is to be hoped, you will not set them the bad example."

"I hain't gwine to set 'em notin' bad, 'cept dey gib me sass; I nebber take dat frum no nigger; but I's gwine to do my bes' fur de master, befo' de Lawd, I is."

"You may go now Zulma," said her mistress.

"The slave took up her bucket and walked out of the room.

"She's a case" remarked Mrs. Hunt.

"That means she's bad, mamma?" asked Lucile with some concern.

"Yes, that she has a character of her own and may give trouble."

"Why did God give her such a fine voice, mamma? He should have given it to a white girl."

"You must not speak about God in that way, Lucile, nor question His motives. Poor Zulma is doomed to a life of slavery; her love for singing may, in a great measure, lighten her labor and give her the only pleasure she can enjoy in this world."

"You make me sorry mamma, for Zulma and all the darkies working in the field."

"There are thousands of poor white people ten times worse off than our negroes, dear. Do you not think your papa kind to his slaves? Are they not well fed, well clothed, and have they not good, comfortable homes to live in?"

"Yes—but—must they not work in the field for their masters, whether they want to or not?"

"Why yes; they are bought for that purpose. Every one must work for a living unless he has money."

"Will the negroes ever get rich, mamma?"

The child's simple question embarrassed the woman and while deliberating with herself for a plausible answer, Lucile came to her relief.

"I reckon they will, mamma;" said she meditatively, they sell so many eggs to the people out on False River.

"They certainly do, my love, and I am sure some of them have laid aside snug little fortunes, that is, a sufficient sum to buy their fineries and trinkets; they are in need of nothing else, I imagine."

That evening Lucile and her mother walked back through the fields to look at the crops.

They met the hands on their way home.

Mrs. Hunt, whose sensitive heart had been disturbed by unusual doubts and emotions brought up by Lucile's questions on the subject of slavery, now listened with strange satisfaction to the peals of laughter which came from the light-hearted laborers. "They are happy, even after a day's toil," thought she; "that joyous ring certainly comes from a contented heart." And her own leaped gladly at the thought.

Mr. Hunt had purchased Zulma for a field hand, and she proved an uncommonly valuable one. Her laborious occupations never interfered with her gayety; the woods and brakes daily resounded with the echoes of her thrilling songs. She was light-hearted and chuck full of worldly love, a fact which rendered her an acquisition to the quarters.

About six weeks after the purchase of this interesting slave, she suddenly vanished from the premises. Search and inquiries failed to throw light on the cause of her disappearance. Mr. Hunt was a kind master; the improbability of her abscondence left no doubt that the girl had met with some dire misfortune. After the lapse of a few days, and when the master had become somewhat reconciled to his loss, to his astonishment, the creature glided like a ghost in his path and throwing herself upon her knees, exclaimed:

"Oh master, pardon me! as long as I lib, I nebber do dat agin."

Her features were haggard and her shrunken eyes betrayed suffering from privations and exposure.

"Where in the world have you been and what has happened to you, my poor girl?" asked Mr. Hunt.

"I was gone "marron," master, I was dun run off."

"And in the name of goodness, what put you into the notion of running off from me."

"For de life on me, I can't tell. marster; dat was jist my way of doin' wid my toddler master. If you don't wip me dis time, I nebber do dat agin; befo' de Lawd, I won't."

It was difficult for Mr. Hunt to control his humor. The idea of the girl running off from comfortable quarters from mere impulse or habit, was one extremely ludicrous to him.

It was with an effort that he maintained his dignity and concealed his propensity to burst into laughter.

He ordered her to "march to the quarters." Dusk was rapidly setting over the landscape. Old Dave, the overseer or general manager among the blacks, was busily engaged in splitting a lot of kindling wood. He dropped his axe and stared at the emaciated form in bewilderment.

"Here is our runaway, Dave," said Mr. Hunt. "She looks as though she has been sufficiently punished for her escapade, don't you think?"

Dave scrutinized the culprit.

"She want grub wurser den a wipin', marster."

"I should think so; I shall take her to the house and have her wants attended to."

"Dat's de bess you kin do fur 'er, jis now," answered Dave, picking up his axe, "termorrer, I'll see to her."

"Let the punishment be light, Dave."

"Don't you bother, marster, 'twont hurt 'er much."

"Have you found her papa?" joyfully cried Lucile, running to meet them. "Oh! mamma, here's poor Zulma! Were you lost, Zulma, lost in the woods among the bears?" "Do tell me all about it. You had a dreadful time, hadn't you?"

The girl maintained a sullen silence and hung her head in mortification.

"Zulma has been a bad girl, dear, and is quite undeserving of your sympathy. She ran off from us of her own free will."

A painful expression settled over the child's features.

"You promised mamma never to do it."

"I wont do it agin," cried Zulma.

I'm sure she will keep her word this time, papa; you are not going to punish her are you?

"No, not I," replied he evasively. "Now pet, go in and give our runaway a good supper; she is in sore need of it."

The next morning Dave stood on the bank of the bayou in the rear of the house, apparently watching the hands as they filed off to their day's labor. Zulma with her hoe thrown over her shoulder, slowly followed her squad. At the bottom of the bayou, a couple of logs served for a temporary bridge. Just as Zulma reached this spot, Dave pounced upon her and dragged her down the steep embankment.

It so happened, that Lucile, on this particualar morning, had taken a notion to catch a mess of crawfish. Line in hand, she appeared on the scene, just as Dave had reached the crossing.

"Where are you going with Zulma, Uncle Dave?" she asked with evident surprise.

"I's gwine to duck 'er, little missis;" he responded, struggling to get a firm hold of Zulma's hands.

"And what for? you bad old man, you!"

"Cause she dun run off frum yo' paw, honey."

"But Uncle Dave, if you drown Zulma, papa will be awfully mad" cried Lucile with a sob, and at the same time, going down to the rescue, "let her loose, Uncle!"

"You go long, little misses, I aint gwine ter dron de gal, I's jist washin' the liveliness out 'er her."

And without further ceremony, he jerked the terrified girl from the log and plunged her several times into the water.

Zulma yelled. Lucile screamed in concert and called her father with all her might to come to Zulma's assistance.

The water in the bayou was only a few feet deep, but the fact did not lessen the unpleasantness of the sousing to Zulma, who firmly believed that Dave was trying his best to drown her.

“Dere, now, you little runaway ‘eathen, you,” he cried, releasing her hands, I dun turn you in ter regler hard-shell Baptis’.” “Doan you niver call yo’self Catlick no more.”

This novel mode of punishment permanently cured Zulma of her unnatural propensity to escape from her work, and Uncle Dave was never again called upon to repeat the chastisement.

CHAPTER IV.

IN CHALPA SWAMP.

MR. HUNT owned a valuable cypress swamp several miles distance in the rear of his plantation. Here, in this aboriginal forest of giant timber, he erected a large sawmill. There was at that time a great demand for lumber and Mr. Hunt, without neglecting his crop, continued to furnish a considerable amount of it to the settlers. At certain periods during the course of the year, he withdrew from the field part of his laborers whom he dispatched to the swamp under the care of a foreman and engineer.

These were provided with safe quarters upon the elevated platform of the mill.

The adjunct of a capacious mud chimney contributed greatly to the comfort of the campers, and they needed only their blankets, their rations, an oven and a skillet to complete their domestic outfit and make life as enjoyable as it was out on the plantation.

The woods were full of game, and there was always a coon or a rabbit baking on the hearth.

After their evening meal, the darkies were accustomed to sit out in the moonlight confabulating, or singing plantation songs with real break-down choruses. And yet, these jolly rogues, in order to establish a reputation as heroes, carried home the most exaggerated accounts of the hardships of life in Chalpa. The remoteness of this dismal region from the settlements, tendered to increase its manifold dangers and fascinations. The credulous were made to believe that in the shifting shadows of the twilight, gaunt cypresses assumed the forms

of ghosts, stalking silently in the gloom. That the air resounded with unearthly grunts and cries; the deadly moccasin and venomous reptiles crawled beneath the bushes and infested every corner of their temporary domicile. The bayou near the mill was alive with alligators splashing in its turbid waters; the woods were full of howling wolves, wild cats and panthers. During the day, the whirr and buzz of the wheel and saw "scared away" these unwelcome creatures, but at nightfall gruesome birds emerged from their haunts, flocks of croaking buzzards and screech-owls flapped their ghoulish wings among the trees.

Such were the tales related by the swampers to their fellow-laborers at home; and Zulma communicated them to Lucile. The subject became a very fascinating one to the child and she was seized with an ungovernable desire to look upon a scene thus teeming with untold perils and enchantment. For a time, her father remained deaf to her pleading for permission to ride behind him on one of his frequent visits to the mill.

Her perseverance, at length, won his consent.

It was a warm, sultry afternoon, in the latter part of August. In order to avoid the heat, they concluded to make the trip through the woods by following a cattle track which led directly to the sawmill.

"We shall be in time for supper," said Mr. Hunt to his wife, as he lifted the delighted Lucile to a seat behind him, "but in case night overtakes us out there we shall make up our minds to camp out. Get Zulma to stay with you till our return."

He spoke in a jesting tone, but a shade of uneasiness swept across his wife's countenance.

"Please do not jest on so serious a subject," she answered reproachfully. "I shall be worried to death if you do not re-

turn to-night. Why, you may be attacked by a bear or a wild-cat, or be bitten by a rattlesnake!"

"Lupus won't let 'em bite, mamma," cried Lucile with trustful readiness. "He'll bark and drive all the bears and snakes out of the woods."

The riders found the cattle path inconveniently narrow, besides, their passage through the woods was greatly retarded by the projecting limbs of trees. But it was pleasant riding beneath the cool shade, and there was fun dodging the vines and branches. They came across the cows; at the sound of Lucile's familiar voice they ceased browsing and stared at her with astonishment depicted in their soft, questioning eyes.

"The darlings!" exclaimed Lucile, "they think it funny to see me out here; eh, papa?"

"No doubt, pet; and they think we have no right to be tramping over their pasture and intruding on their privacy,"

Lucile's quick eye detected a variety of plants which had hitherto escaped her father's notice. She pointed out to him a bouquet of magnificent ferns luxuriating in the trunk of a hollow tree, a rustic vase in Nature's conservatory.

All along the route her little fingers clutched at the alluring leaves, blossoms, or bunches of wild grapes falling within her reach. Now, they dived into a golden mass of love-vine rioting over a thorn bush; then grasped a cluster of flowing trumpet flowers, or a panicle of purple asters. The gaudy woodpeckers clinging to the bark of the trees reminded her of tiger lilies flung there by a gust of wind. At every turn they came across rabbits and squirrels which Lupus dutifully chased out of sight.

So absorbed were the minds of our travelers in rural observations, they were totally unconscious of the change which had taken place in the weather, until a canopy of black clouds was

suddenly drawn across the heavens. Its threatening aspect alarmed Mr. Hunt; he increased his speed that he might reach his journey's end before the outbreak of the approaching storm. The noise of the engine fell gratefully upon his ear. A blast of cold wind swooped upon the woods just as they reached the sawmill. Amid the loud commotion of wind among the swaying branches and creaking timber, Mr. Hunt heard with dismay, the sharp and ominous cracking of the fabric which was the only shelter within reach. At this moment, some of the hands came rushing in carrying their working implements; at the sight of their master, they broke into exclamations of surprise:

“Lawd, yere's marstar!”

“Sake's alive! an' he dun bring de gal wid 'im!”

“Whar you cum frum, marstar?” asked one taking his master's bridle rein. “Was dat you bring dis yere blow?”

“Don't ask idle questions Andre!” replied Mr. Hunt; hitch my horse to that sapling over yonder. Run up one of you boys and tell Mr. Prospère to put out the furnace fire. “Come darling,” continued he, gathering Lucile in his arms, “let us get out of the wind.”

The negroes ran under the ground floor of the mill and their master carried Lucile up to the engine-room.

The blow, which for a moment, had threatened to demolish the building, had subsided to so portentous a calm, that nature seemed to have suspended animation, or like a living thing, had fallen into a trance. The frightful stillness became so oppressive to those who waited that it was a relief to hear the thunder growling at a distance and to see the trees shivering in the gathering gloom. At intervals, the lightning licked with fiery tongue, the dusky vault of heaven, or broke the brooding silence with fierce explosions.

This was the prelude to the impending storm which suddenly swept over the place like a West Indian hurricane.

The panic-stricken negroes scrambled up the steps and ran to their master, huddling around him like so many sheep.

‘Marster,’ cried one in a hoarse voice, ‘I’s feared de-de judgment day’s ’bout bustin’ on us.’

‘I reckon not Andre; the Bible says that the world is to be destroyed by fire. Don’t you hear how it’s raining?’

‘Tank God!’ responded Andre with fervency.

A lurid flame flashed through the building, exposing with fearful distinctness the ghostly features of its inmates. It was followed by a crash so terrific and deafening, Mr. Hunt believed that the mill had been struck; he sprang to his feet with Lucile in his arms.

Simultaneously with the explosion, the negroes fell upon their knees, groaning and enjaculating:

‘Lawd Jesus, sabe us!’ cried one.

‘Little mo’ time, Lawd ter sabe my po’ soul,’ came from another, in a heart-rending tone.

‘I dun grievus ’gunst yo’, Lawd; ef yo’ leave me off dis once, yo’ aint gwine ter know me fur de same nigger, Lawd.’

Such were the prayers and confessions which fell involuntarily from the lips of the would-be penitents; they mingled with the roar of the elements and created a pandemonium din which filled Lucile with consternation.

‘O papa!’ she cried throwing her arms around her father’s neck. ‘God won’t let the lightning kill them; I’ve asked him not to—tell them that papa—tell them quick!’ she reiterated, as once again, the promiscuous groans and prayers predominated over the noise outside.

Mr. Hunt’s cheek flushed with vexation; he unwound the child’s arms from around his neck and turned to the cowering slaves.

"See here," he said, in a commanding voice, "I want you to stop this nonsense; you are frightening your little mistress by your cowardly behavior. Can't you pray without making such a racket?"

"But marster," responded one of the sinners lifting his eyes with pitiful humility, "we'se a parcel of ripobates au' de Lawd ain't gwine to notice 'cept we makes all dis yere fuss!"

The timely reprimand produced its desired effect; the avowed reprobates subdued the turbulence of their souls and awaited in silent resignation the final proceedings of the tempest.

After awhile, the wind began to subside, but the rain still fell in torrents. Mr. Hunt was now seriously disturbed on Lucile's account; he was aware of the obstacles which would prevent them from returning home that night even were the rain to cease. It was with misgiving he broached the subject to the child.

"I am afraid pet," he began, with marked hesitation, "I'm afraid—we will have to stay here to-night. We could hardly pass through those dark woods after such a storm. We could never find our way through the tangled bushes; we may stumble over fallen trees or meet with some other accident. Would you not stay here with me until morning?"

"I shouldn't mind staying with you, papa," she answered, looking up with tears in her eyes, "but we can't leave poor mamma all by herself, you know."

"You little goose! mamma is better off than we are; won't she have a nice, dry bed to sleep on and Zulma to keep her company. You had better think of ourselves, who will have to rough it like real soldiers!"

"And will it be camping out in Chalpa?" she asked with childish interest.

"A genuine campaign my Love; that will be something to boast of at home."

And Lucile vigorously nodded in approval.

Night descended upon the sodden waste of leaves and moss beaten down by the rain. A sougling wind continued to harass the dripping trees and saplings, which bent over and staggered like a set of ragged beggars plodding through the misty darkness. All sorts of strange noises now began to assert themselves. Winged visitants flitted back and forth with unpleasant and persistent familiarity. The incessant chirping of the insect tribes, the doeful shrieks of night birds combined with the stentorian bellowing of the bullfrog, produced a concatenation of sounds which greatly enhanced the dreariness of the dismal place.

The hosts now manifested hospitality by hustling around and kindling a fire. As it was made of dry cypress twigs, the flames instantly leaped into a mass of radiant tongues, accompanied by a cheerful crackle and a discharge of sparks which greatly contributed to dissipate the shadows of nightfall.

"What have you for supper, Dick?" asked the master, as the head cook busied himself among the pots and tin pans.

"Jis w'at you gin us marster an' a leetle over," he ventured to say with a knowing smile and glancing around at his master with an eye half cocked, as one laboring under a misgiving.

"And what may that be, I wonder?"

The negro uncovered an oven which sat upon a shelf and with an iron fork lifted from it a rabbit baked to a russet brown.

"Is that all, Dick?"

"If dat ain't nuff fur yo' an' little mistis," he replied, dropping the tempting rodent back into the pot and contemplating its contents with a mischievous twinkle—"ef 'tain't, dey'sde hind part of a shoat layin' 'side ov it."

"You incorrigible scamp!" exclaimed Mr. Hunt starting up from his comfortable position on the tool chest. "Did I not forbid you to kill anything but game and you know I meant wild animals."

"Dat's 'zactly wot we dun, mars; dis yere berry shoat was rarin' wile w'en Mr. Prospère shoot 'im."

"Now, let this be the last time I hear of your shooting hogs around here. Haven't you enough to eat without killing what don't belong to you.?"

"We got plenty bakin' 'tatoes and cornmeal, marster."

"And as much game as you want."

"Dat's so; an' Mr. Prospère, he got eggs an' coffee—an' —an'"—stammered he with a glance in the direction where the engineer sat smoking his clay pipe, "an' sum'n else in dat chess of his—he got a jug!"

"That's none of your business. Dick," replied Mr. Hunt, turning his head to hide his amusement at the slave's cunning insinuations.

Her long ride and the novelty of eating a meal from a tin plate greatly stimulated Lucile's appetite. The baked rabbit, fried bacon and corn cakes proved the most palatable repast she had ever tasted. The negroes, her humble hosts, waited upon her with loving assiduity, continually replenishing her plate with the rarest tit-bits found in their menu. After this much relished supper was over, the master and his slaves sat out on the platform, the former to get a whiff of air and the latter to smoke and discuss the late storm.

Lucile and Lupus, after a critical survey of the domestic arrangements at the mill, concluded to join the group outside.

"Ain't you awfully afraid and lonesome here at night?" she asked, looking at the negroes with sympathetic interest.

"Dey's times we is, little mistis," answered one of the number, "but yo' see 'taint always dark and slushy like dis ev'y night. W'en de moon shine, we got good time huntin' coon an' possum, or we sits out here an' sings."

"Why don't you sing when it's dark?" asked the child with awakened curiosity.

"Lor, we dun no honey, can't tell w'at sort of sperits bees prowlin' round dese yere swamps."

"But papa is here to-night; you won't be afraid to sing, will you?"

"I reckon not; does you want to hear us bad?"

"Yes, I do, and Lupus wants it too," replied Lucile seating herself on one of the logs.

The complacent darkies scrutinized their puny audience with broad grins and began tuning their souls to the right pitch by clapping together their brawny hands.

"Less sing Poor ole Ned," said one.

"No, Jim Crack Corn de be'," suggested another.

"Dis yere right time fur ter Coon Hunt," put in a third, who acted as the leader of the Nubian orchestra. "Me and Jim gwine to do de singing an' you all boys muss jine in de choris. Les start, Jim!"

"Oh come darkies out in de moonlight.

CHORUS.

Ho! heigh ho! heigh ho!

Possum an' de coons' all out to-night.

Ho! heigh ho! heigh ho!

Dey's prancin' 'roun' de ole simmon tree.

Sho, dat's so, less go!

An' callin' all dey frens fur ter see.

Ho! less go! less go!

Ole possum can't fool dis yere nigger.

Ho! less go! less go!

He'll kick twixt de dog an' de trigger.

Ho! heigh ho! heigh ho!

Dey a feas' comin' on putty soon.
Boys, less go! less go!
Less us skip fur ter fetch datter coon.
Boys, less go! less go!
We kin meet wid de gals dat we knows.
Sho! dat's so! dat's so!
Dey will come on de wing of de crows.
Boys, less go! less go!"

When the song was ended the last words of the chorus re-echoed against the neighboring wall of cypress trees, in weird, unearthly sounds. Although their song was of the rousing sort, there was something extremely pathetic in this earnest outpouring of their music-loving nature.

The expression of their black faces was not visible in the starlight, but there was in their bosoms an undercurrent of pleasurable excitement which clearly revealed itself in their singing.

"How does you like dish vere singing, little mistis?" asked Jonas with conscious pride.

The whole performance had somewhat stupified Lucile; she had never before listened to such boisterous singing; nevertheless, she was vastly entertained.

"That was a fine song, Jonas, I want you all to sing another one just like it."

But the conductor here lifted his finger in a listening attitude.

"Heah dat? old Tige dun fall on de trac of sum sort of varmint!"

Lupus too, heard the baying; he pricked his ears, whined and shook his shaggy frame with impatience.

"W'at fur yo' cuttin' all dem shines, Lupis?" asked Jonas; "you yeard dem yedder dargs kavotin' in dem woods an' you bees wantin' to jine 'em, eh? But you's too big a cowed to do it; aint dat so?"

Lupus seemed to comprehend that his valor was impugned and he instantly refuted the charge by rushing to the edge of the platform and uttering a growl of indignation.

"Dat's all you kin do!" cried Jonas tauntingly. "Why don't you jump down an' jine de cirkis?"

Quivering with excitement, the dog bounded back to where his mistress sat; he poised on his haunches and gazed in her face with a pleading, questioning look.

"Lupus is not at all afraid to go, Jonas, he thinks I want him to stay with me and—I'm—not a bit afraid to tell him to go either," she added with a little tremor in her voice.

"Dem gi' 'im a chance, little mistis, an' let 'im rip," replied the ducky in a provoking manner.

Lucile made a noble effort to stifle her fears and mistrust, but she was determined to give the dog an opportunity to prove his prowess.

"Go Lupus," she said, pointing to the steps, but to her dismay Lupus began capering around instead of availing himself of the permission accorded him.

At this moment the baying of a half a dozen dogs fell clamorously upon his ear.

"Go and catch the coon, Lupus," his mistress cried, in a pleading voice.

The creature now seemed to appreciate the motive which prompted his dismissal with such unusual decision. He bounded to the edge of the platform, sniffed and hung his head down as if calculating the distance for a leap.

"He's feared to crack his neck-bone!" observed Jonas, with a wicket grin; "get 'im to take de step, little mistis."

As soon as he was shown the safe exit, Lupus scampered down and joined without delay the chorus outside,

"Now boys," said Andre, rising and knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "Less go an' inves' dis yere buznus."

"We gwine to swamp sho'," suggested Jonas.

"Git out man, can't we swim? Come on!"

On their return, the negroes informed their master that the dog had already 'treed de coon;' it was too dark to see it, but they had fastened Tige and Growler to the tree to keep the quarry "company." Lupus, to Lucile's chagrin, had volunteered to keep guard with the rest.

"He's de bess coon dawg I ebber laid eyes on," remarked Jonas, now turned eulogist, "you ort ter see 'im, little mistis; he's whoopin' mad, a tearin' roun' dat tree, skinnin' ebery bit of de bark off tryin' ter git at dat varmint."

"Nebber seed such eagersom dawgs!" added Dick, his eyes batting with animation, "dey doan' take time to breeve, dey so full of satisfaction!"

The inmates of the mill now retired; each went to his individual blanket. With Mr. Prospère's overcoat, Lucile made herself a comfortable couch upon which she slept sweetly and soundly until daybreak. She was then awakened by the loud talking and commotion outside of the building. She was at first bewildered by her strange and unfamiliar surroundings. The grey dawn lighted up the wide opening at the front; she ran to the spot in hope of seeing her father. She caught sight of him standing a few yards off surrounded by the mill hands, who appeared to be in a high state of excitement. Jonas was in the crowd and he was struggling with all his might to escape from the grip of one of his companions.

"Lawd a mussy!" he cried, in a terror stricken voice, "let me run!"

"You dun run fur 'nough fur de bref dat's lef' you," answered his captor tightening his grasp. "Now tell me w'at dat you runnin' frum?"

"Let me loose fuss," pleaded Jonas, with eyes protruding with terror.

"Ain't gwine to truss you, man. Say, did you see dead people back dare?"

"O Lawd, no; 'twas up in de tree!"

"You want'er tell me you raisin' all dish yere rackit 'bout dat coon in de tree?"

"Lawd, yes; but—it—it wa'nt a coon," he corrected himself, "it war a critter big as er—er tiger."

"Lis'en ter dat fool. will yer! He nebber laid eyes on no tiger 'cept it bees ole Tige," said Andre with a sneer.

"He must have seen a wildeat," said Mr. Hunt. "Come on, boys, and let us find out. Andre, run up and get the rifle and ask Mr. Prosper to stay with Lucile till our retern."

"You kin run now, you chicken'-hearted nigger you!" exclaimed Andre, giving Jonas a parting shake. "Run under de beeb an' stay dare till we gits through settlin' dish yere hash of yourn."

But Jonas had twofold reason for declining to make use of his liberty "to run."

In the first place, his master's presence promised his personal safety; in the second, his ire had been provoked and he was aroused to a dogged resolution to follow his companions as far as was consistent with his reviving courage.

The tree around which the dogs had been cutting up such "high jinks" as the darkies expressed it, was a large hickory so thickly draped with moss that it was with difficulty the eye penetrated the deep recesses of its interior branches. Mr. Hunt and his party halted at some distance from it to examine the rifle and to put themselves in a position of defense in case of an emergency. He judged from the frantie behavior of the dogs, that there was serious cause for their extraordinary demonstrations.

"My Lawd!" ejaculated Andre, "jis lis'en to dat tremendous fuss. 'Cordin' ter de trandum dey's raisin' dey must 'ave treed a lellephant. I say, contined he, tip-toeing towards the spot and peeping cautiously up where the thick, grey moss hung in heavy bunches. "I say, an' it's my 'pinion dat it 's er—er—By jingo!" he exclaimed with a look of horror. "Let me git out er yere, folks!" Springing back to a safe distance, he stood for a few seconds puffing like an ox and speechless with fear and surprise. "Come back yere, marstar! dere's sum'in' settin' up dare w—wursser den—den a wil'cat."

But Mr. Hunt approached the tree, peering with anxious eye in the direction indicated by Andre.

Crouched on one of the horizontal limbs, he saw the shadowy form of an immense panther slashing his tail back and forth with suppressed fury. It was evident that the creature's powers of endurance were exhausted and that he was on the point of terminating his long seige by making a spring upon his tormenters. Mr. Hunt realized the danger of his situation; he thought of Lucile, his lips compressed and the blood retreated to his heart. There was not a moment's time to lose. He raised his rifle with utmost precaution, took aim and fired. The report was followed by a furious howl and a terrific crash among the branches. The beast had been shot through the loins and fell from its place of refuge, with a dead, heavy thud.

As soon as he reached the ground, the dogs, with deafening outcries, sprang upon him with teeth and paw and the negroes rushed to the spot with dreadful shrieks.

"Gi' it to him, Tige!"

"Whoopee! dat's right! Scratch his eyes out, Lupis!"

"Ain't dis fun, dough!"

"Dem dawgs shakin' de life outer 'im," cried Dick, holding for a second his club suspended in air; "dey doan gee no body er chance fur er chunk at dat animal."

"We was all mighty jubious 'bout gettin' 'im," exclaimed Jonas exultantly, "but we's pounin' on 'im now, aint we boys?"

"An' you's a fine one to brag, you tarnacious cowid, you!" answered Dick with flashing eyes. "You feels putty safe now chunkin' at dish yere dead critter, doz you?"

"I sho doz," replied Jonas with the air of a hero. "I was de deaf of 'im."

The turmoil and excitement was overwhelming. Mr. Hunt, unable to control the combatants or end the animal's suffering, stood silently watching the unequal conflict.

The noise of this frightful turbulence reached Lucile; her dismay and anxiety concerning her father's safety were such that her guardian was forced to conduct her to the scene of carnage, where she witnessed with tears of anguish and cries of terror, the death struggles of the mighty panther of Chalpa Swamp.

CHAPTER V.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

AN INTERESTING event in the life of our pioneers, was a visit to the old folks at *Corne à Chevreuil*. The rides out to False River were truly delightful, especially in early fall, when the air was as fragrant and exhilarating as that of a mountain region. The road-sides were lined with wild flowers. The pale, feathery asters filled the woods with sweet odors, and the sturdy vagabonds in tyrian purple, sported among the thistle and aromatic thyme. The sweet songs of familiar birds, mingled with the shrill cries of the jay and the tinkling of cow-bells in the distance, suggested running waters, cool retreats and other woodland mysteries.

Our travellers never accustomed themselves to the sudden change of scenery, from murky bayous and gloomy woods, to the radiant and picturesque landscape which greeted their eyes on reaching the banks of False River.

Lucile went into raptures over the enchanting *coup-d'oeul*, but her mother gazed upon it with subdued pleasure. Here was the panorama of the blue river quivering in the sunlight, of the island dotted with little brown houses, and more beautiful still, were the circling shores, dissolving in the etherial atmosphere. There was a pastoral charm in the flocks of sheep strolling on the banks, and in the cows contentedly feasting on the floating *algae*.

Lucile greatly enjoyed visits to her grandparents, for she dearly loved the rambling old house, its quaint furniture and the smoky, allegorical pictures which hung on the walls; she loved to roam over the big yard, where the cattle and

sheep browsed luxuriously on the mossy turf, and to play under the liveoaks which, once upon a time, had sheltered from the noonday sun, the Lafitte brothers. She doated on her grandparents, especially on her *grandpère*, who was perfectly devoted to her. She would sit for hours upon his knee, relating to him some of the stirring events she had read in history, or the wonderful accounts travellers gave of their experiences in foreign lands. M. Lafitte silently listened, and absorbed with child-like interest, whatever Lucile, with her superior knowledge, was pleased to impart to him. When weary of her task, she would lay her head against his broad shoulder, and twirling his silver watch chain about her slender fingers, demand a story in return.

“No, no *grandpère*,” she often protested, with a determined shake of her curls, “You’ve already told me about Com-père Renard and Bonqui, I want to hear something about giants and fairies.”

Grandpère’s knowledge of these supernatural beings was sadly deficient and he was often compelled to have recourse to his own inventive powers which, unfortunately, were so inadequate, that he invariably disgraced himself in the eyes of his disappointed grandchild.

Lucille was very fond of wandering about the fields and roadside in search of wild flowers. One morning in Autumn, whilst strolling along the banks of the bayou, bent on her favorite persuit, she espied, to her infinite delight, her grandfather’s antiquated cabriolet coming up the road. Old Sorrel harnessed to it, was jogging along in his usual contemplative gait. She waved with delirious joy the bunch of verbenas she had just gathered, and hastened to shorten the distance between the beloved visitors and herself. The reader is left to imagine the meeting. M. Lafitte never came so near being strangled, and

his venerable wife's lace kerchief was so rumpled, she was ashamed to present herself, after the ordeal.

As soon as the visitors were seated and had fallen into quiet conversation, Lucile, as was her wont, ran to the kitchen for a live coal for *grandpère* to light his pipe with; he had no use for matches and always carried his flint-box, in case of an emergency.

"*Grandpère* was dying to see his *sauvagesse*," said the old man, placing his grandchild on his knee and passing his fingers caressingly through her shining curls.

"Were you, old precious? Then I wish you'd feel like that all the time; we would have you here every day."

Grandpère threw back his head and puffed out great volumes of smoke.

"Are you afraid to make me cry, *grandpère*?" asked Lucile, with a touching smile.

"Yes, *ma chère*, this old *perique* will surely draw the tears from your eyes. Go over there and tease your *grand-mère* 'til I get through smoking."

"No, I sha'n't; I'll go to the bayou and catch some nice fish for dinner—*sacalait*s, *grandpère*."

"What a fine idea, *petite*, you make my mouth water. Take your line and go."

Lucile bounded out of the room and ran to the poultry-yard, where Zulma was counting a brood of chickens. "Zulma," she cried, "I'm going to catch a mess of fish for *grandpère*'s dinner. I want you to go with me."

"Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen. Dere now," said Zulma, dropping into a soap-box the last one of the downy chicks. "I's been countin' 'em t'ree time over and ev'y time dey's *one mo'* of 'em."

"If you keep on counting," said Lucile, laughing, "you need not to set any more hens, Zulma."

"I'd ruther carry on dis here bizness de reg'lar way, Miss Lucile; I doan' want no conger chicken, me."

The bayou teemed with the finest fishes, at all seasons of the year, and in less than an hour's time, one could catch a mess of the finest perch and trout. Lucile and Zulma procured their bait and tackle and started off towards a favorite haunt of theirs—a group of willows, in the midst of which lay the prostrate trunk of a large gum tree.

It had fallen partly across the water and its gaunt limbs, extending in every direction, reminded Lucile of a Briarens struggling to raise himself up from the earth.

Regardless of the danger, she ran along the full length of the trunk, which projected a considerable distance across the water. Here she settled herself upon a forked limb and planted her booted feet for support against a section of half decayed bark. Within a convenient distance between them, Zulma had suspended to a projecting limb, her receptacle for future captives, this was a coffee bag, which she partly emersed to keep the fish alive.

"Da'll all feel so comfor'able in dere, little Missis, da'll never dream da gwine into de fryin' pan."

On the opposite shore was a building in course of construction; it was a cabin, destined for a new settler. The strokes of the hammer sounded loud and clear, and the reverberating echoes filled the woods with incessant clamor.

"If that man keeps on hammering, he'll frighten away all the fish in the bayou, won't he?" asked Lucile.

"I 'clare he will. I got a great notion to holler at him, and ax him to jump down dat roof till we cotch a mess."

"Don't do it; let them finish their house, maybe they're in a hurry."

"No bigger hurry dan we all; he can help dat totter one to toat de shingles 'till we's ready to go."

"You had better leave them alone, Zulma."

Lucile had thrown off her wide-brimmed hat: the breeze, which ruffled the surface of the dark green water, lifted from her brow and cheeks the pretty curls, escaped from confinement. She made a pretty picture, perched on her rustic seat, her bright eyes eagerly watching the gaudy floats.

"Put on yo' hat, Miss Lucile; dey's a streak of shine plum on yo' face: fuss thing you'll know, all de turkev eggs'll be out."

"What sort of eggs are those," asked Lucile.

"Dem's black specks on white folk's faces."

"You mean freckles? O, Zulma, I have a bite!" Lucile jerked from the water a vicious looking fish.

"Swing him 'roun' little mistis; it's nuffin' but 'n ole cat!" Zulma quickly disengaged the hook from the throat of the despised prey and pitched it back into the water. "Dere now; dat's de way we serves 'em, ware I cum frum." The last expression was one she had often thrown in parenthesis, when recalling events in her former sphere of life.

Lucile's curiosity to ascertain the situation of that boasted locality was aroused, and she asked: "Where *did* you come from anyway?"

"Oh, fur frum dis yere place; clost to a big river."

"I know; from False River, where, *grandpere* and *grand-mère* live."

"Dat I didn't; I cum frum fudder'n dat. I cum from a place clost to Waterloo. Ever bin dar, little mistis?"

"No, I never, but papa has."

"I rekin so. I kin tell you, it's de fust place in de lan' fur suckis'. Yo' pa ever tuck you to a suckis?"

"No, but he promised to take me to the convent, and that's as good as a circus, I know."

"It's niver bin ter de convint, but I'se bin ter de suckis, an' I knows dat can't be beat. I seed dere, a gal litttlier den you, tearin' roun' on top of six hawses."

"O Zulma! what a story!"

"Befo' de Lawd. 'taint. She did go flyin' roun' a-holin' de reius a bowin' an' sendin' off kisses. But I seed more'n dat in dem suckisses."

"I don't want to hear about it. Don't talk."

Naturally, Lucile was nettled at Zulma's worldly knowledge and experience, and she was fearful of being questioned and compelled to expose her own ignorance.

The fish had begun to bite, and the anglers were jerking out of their native element quite a supply of the reddish-brown beauties.

"You ever seed a steamboat, little mistis?" asked Zulma, breaking the silence and casting a side glance at Lucile.

Lucile rested with her conscience for a second or so, trying to find an excuse to save herself from further humiliation as well as prevarication.

"Of course I have," she ventured to reply.

"Ware dat you seed dat steamboat, Miss Lucile?"

There was no retreat; she had tried to mislead Zulma, but she had not the heart to tell a downright falsehood; truth with her was like second nature.

"Why, I saw it in a book, Zulma," Lucile answered in a desperate sort of way.

"Oh, you git out! lit'le mistis! Dem steamboats you see in de book can't hole a candle to dem *real live* 'ems, struttin' 'long in de Mississippi river."

"I'm going on a boat, when papa takes me to the convent," said Lucile with a triumphant smile.

"You is? Better look out! dey pooty tricky!"

"How are they tricky, I should like to know?"

"How?" echoed Zulma with a warning stare. "Ef you had seed all the hex-plosions I seed, you wouldn't ax dat question, lit'le mistis."

"Tell me about these hex-plosions," asked Lucile, ignorantly repeating Zulma's pronounciation of the word. "What are they?"

"Dey's de bustin's chile, de mos' awful sight under de sun. Look! look! over yunder at dat copy-head streakin' troo de water. Aint it glidin' slick an' cunnin' dough?"

Both gazed in breathless admiration at the approaching reptile. Its sinuous folds glistened below the dark, green waves, its eyes gleamed fiercely in the proudly poised head.

"Dat snake 'mine me of one of dem boats I's tellin' you 'bout little mistis. Dey so pooty to look at wid dey lights an' dey caloos (dat's de music), an' de ladies trampin' roun' de gal'ry. But law! we'n dey blows up! Save me! Sich noise, screechin' an' hollerin' you niver heerd of! Some of dem passengers (dem's de people on de boat), dey flies up in de air, some drap down in de big fernice in de bottom of de boat, toddlers bus' dey heads on de levees. De ole folks, dey grabs hole of cotton bales and cheers and chunks of wood, but dem po chillums, dey goes right under; nobody gwine to look arter 'em, you bet! It's ev'y nigger fur hissself and de devil take de hin'mos'."

Lucile listened to these details with a soul filled with vague terrors. She pictured in her mind one of these awful

catastrophies in which her parents and herself were to be the unfortunate victims. In her abstraction, her fishing rod dropped from her fingers; she made a sudden motion to regain it. The bark against which she was resting her feet, gave way; she lost her balance and fell from her seat into the cold depths of the bayou. Zulma uttered a shrill cry and stared, with a wild, despairing look, on the spot whence the child had disappeared. Lucile arose to the surface of the water, throwing up her arms and calling her father in a choking, unnatural voice. In a second, she again disappeared from sight. Zulma, although frantic with terror, prostrated herself on the body of the tree and extended her hand in readiness to seize her little mistress, in case she once more emerged within reach.

But a second seemed like an eternity to the faithful slave. She would not allow Lucile to perish without risking her own life in trying to save her. Selecting a position where she could sustain herself by clinging to one of the strongest branches, she lowered herself into the water. At that very moment, Lucile's inanimate form re-appeared, and Zulma, with a desperate effort, contrived to seize it.

With one arm she clung to the limb for support, and grasped her burden with the other.

The air was rent with her loud and unearthly outcries. "Oh! Lawd, Lawd! Come quick!—somebody!—come quick! Miss Lucile dun drown! People, come on, fur God sake!" She held Lucile in her close embrace, and with presence of mind rare in similar cases, she lifted with her chin the face of unconscious child from the water. Her superhuman exertions and the excitement under which she labored were fast overpowering her strength. But she clung to her young mistress, even when despair had overtaken her.

The workmen on the opposite shore had, from the first, taken in the situation, and with all possible expedition, had

hurried to the rescue. They rushed down the bank to the skiff in which they were in the habit of crossing the bayou each morning.

"Ole on, 'ole on, gal!" cried one of the men, as he expeditiously unfastened the skiff. "Take courage, we comin'—'ole up, gal."

With a dozen strokes of his oars he managed to reach the spot where the exhausted slave was on the point of sinking with her precious burden.

He lifted the child from Zulma's arm and laid her gently down in the bottom of the boat. He then endeavored to persuade the other to re-ascend the trunk of the fallen tree, as his skiff was small and there was danger of its overturning. This he found impossible; the girl had overtaxed her strength and was in no condition to make the exertions.

"Tak'er away fuss—tak'er to her ma! I'll 'ole on," cried the generous creature, clinging desperately to the limb which had been the means of rescue.

The family, now frantic with terror, appeared on the bank.

Zulma's piercing screams had reached their ears; for an instant all were stunned with surprise and apprehension.

It required some seconds to ascertain whence had come the ominous cries, or to realize the cause.

With one accord, they rushed to the bank of the bayou; the scene which met their eyes once more paralyzed them with terror and agony.

They saw only the precious body which lay limp and lifeless in the bottom of the boat.

A smothered cry escaped the mother's white lips and she dropped like a stone as a black shadow fell between her and the appalling sight.

"Is she dead?" asked Mr. Lafitte, as the skiff touched the shore. His voice was hoarse and strange; his frame shook with cruel apprehensions.

"I think she has only fainted," replied the man; "she did not remain long in the water."

"*Oh ma p'tite! ma chère!*" cried the stricken grandfather. "It was through my fault that thy precious life was endangered, and I would lay down a thousand lives for thine!"

It is unnecessary to record the scenes which followed Lucile's resuscitation; Zulma's rescue, Mr. Hunt's unutterable feelings when recalled from the field, or the joy which succeeded despair when the sufferers had been restored to health.

"Mamma, I have something to tell you," said Lucile, the next morning after the accident which had so nearly cost her her life. "God was very good to let Zulma take me out of the water!"

"Indeed He was, my precious, we should never forget His mercy."

"But mamma, He had a great notion to let me drown. I had been very wicked just a little while before I fell in."

"You, wicked, Lucile! what do you mean?"

"I wanted to tell Zulma a story, mamma," answered the child, covering her face to hide her confusion.

"A story! and why should you?" exclaimed Mrs. Hunt with amazement.

"Well mamma she was telling me about so many things I knew nothing of and I had never seen. I was ashamed that she knew more than I. When she asked me whether I had ever seen a steamboat—she meant a *real* steamboat—I told her I had."

"My darling, how could you?"

"I thought I had fixed it up all right with my conscience, that voice you told me of. I had seen pictures of steamboats. I thought it came to the same—that is—I tried to think so, but it would never do; I know it would be wrong."

"If you meant to deceive her, it was certainly wrong."

"And was it a story, mamma?"

"I am sorry to say, it was."

Tears started in the large, sad eyes of the child.

"And suppose I had drowned, mamma?"

Mrs. Hunt kissed her quivering lips.

"God is all merciful, my love, when you struggled in the cold water, you remembered your sins and felt sorry for them, no doubt."

"No, I did not; it was so awful, I could think of nothing; only when I came up and saw the banks and trees again, I thought of papa and called him to take me out."

At this moment Zulma appeared at the door.

"Come, Zulma," cried Lucile, extending her hand.

"How does you feel, Miss Lucile?"

"O very much better than last night."

Zulma approached the bed and laid her small, black hand upon Lucile's fair and delicate fingers.

"I thank you a thousand times Zulma, for taking me out of the water."

"O dat nuffin', little mistis," replied the slave timidly and with hesitation. "I wasn't gwine to let you drown by yourself, nohow."

"What must I give you for what you did?"

"Nuffin' 't'all, mistis, I was glad 'nuff to pick you out 'er de bayou; but," continued she, glancing towards her mistress, "I was pooty skeered, I kin tell you."

As soon as Mrs. Hunt left the room, Zulma stooped over and asked in a low voice: "Did you go an' tell yo' ma how you cum fall off de ole log, little mistis?"

"What do you mean?" asked Lucile, recalling with apprehension the circumstances of her falsehood.

"Don't you 'member 'bout dat boat bustin'?"

"No, I didn't tell mamma, for I don't know myself, *how* I came to fall off that tree."

"Den, fur de Lawd, don't you tell, Miss Lucile, I'se niver gwine to furgiv' myself fur skeerin' you so!"

"I shall never speak of it Zulma, but papa intends to pay you for saving my life. He will give you *anything* you ask for Zulma."

"Go 'long, little mistis! I don't want no pay fur fishin' you out. Didn't I tell you it was *me* skeered you inter de bayou?"

"Well that wouldn't keep you from asking for something you wanted real bad, Zulma."

"Dat's so!" replied Zulma, running her eyes along the ceiling while making a mental inventory of her wardrobe. There was nothing in that line that could add to her comfort or happiness, she thought except a pink calico gown for next Easter, but then, there ought to be something better than that, a pair of cloth gaiters, for instance! "No," decidedly thought Zulma, da'll wear out befo' I kin turn 'roun', my feet deaf on shoes. "O yes! now I got it!" she exclaimed, looking beamingly down on Lucile. "Sumfin' I wants drea'ful bad, but I knows dey's no use axin, I wont git it."

"Tell me what it is," asked Lucile, somewhat dismayed at Zulma's ambitious demand, whatever that might be, "perhaps papa will buy it when he goes to New Orleans."

"But he ain't gwine ter buy it," replied Zulma, with an emphatic nod.

Lucile stared at the girl with increasing surprise. "Where must he get it from then?"

"He ain't gwine to git, jis gwine ter say: '*Zulma, you kin leave de feel now an' go ter de house; I gee you ter yo' little mistis, fur good an' fur ever!*'"

"Why Zulma!" cried Lucile, with a joyous expression lightening up her pretty face, "that won't be a *bit* hard for papa to say, and I'll be ever so glad to have you to wait on me just a little, you know, Zulma, like Plaisance does on *grand-mère*."

"Dat'll be a 'unded times easier den pullin' de hoe, an' pickin' dead loads of cotton," remarked Zulma, lifting Lucile from the pillows in order to shake and rearrange them. "An' den," continued she, "I'd rudder b'long to *you*, 'cause I love you, little mistis!"

Lucile had no difficulty in obtaining Zulma's request.

CHAPTER VI.

LUCILE'S GUEST.

ONE evening, in the early part of September, Zulma came to her mistress for permission to take Lucile out to gather muscadines.

Since the incident recorded in the preceding chapter, Zulma had been unusually indulged by her owners; her wishes were seldom disregarded.

"We jis gwine ter de fur bridge," she explained, "I yeard muscadines 'bout dere jis bustin' wid juice."

Lucile, who was sitting under the mulberry trees hemming handkerchiefs, started up with an eager expression on her face.

"Let me go, mamma," she pleaded, "I shall bring you the nicest I find."

"On one condition, darling," replied her mother, gazing fondly into the child's bright eyes.

"I know, mamma; I musn't run along the trunks of trees when they're near the water."

Mrs. Hunt smiled rather ruefully. "And you must not stray off farther than the bridge."

About a half a mile from the house, a deep bayou ran from the rear of the place into Grosse Tete. A decided depression at its mouth compelled Mr. Hunt to bridge it at a considerable distance above it, thus leaving a large strip of land between the bayou and the public road. The wild grape and muscadine vines scaled the venerable trees which shaded the ground; the Virginia Creeper and Parsiflora clutched at every bush within reach. It was a spot where the birds loved to

build and to enliven with their songs. The bridge with its natural surroundings was a charming bit of landscape. The willow and gum trees which grew in the bed of the bayou, interlaced their limbs above it in the form of a canopy. The place was a favorite resort of the Hunt family, and many were the Sabbath evenings they spent here, sitting on the glossy slope, listening to the low murmur of the water pouring into Grosse Tete.

Lucile and Zulma began prospecting as soon as they reached their destination.

"Le' 's hunt fur maypops fuss thing, little mistis," said Zulma, peering into a bush. "Lor me! here's a ness of 'em!"

"A nest of birds' eggs?"

"Of maypops, chile; jess look at 'em!"

Lucile stood on tiptoe and peered into the recess.

"My! are they not fine and ripe?"

"You bet; dey's mos' a dozen of 'em; jess 'nuff fur you an' me."

"Why, how many can *you* eat—you?"

"Looky 'ere, Miss Lucile, dat'en what's gwine to crawl 'mongst dem snakes, got de right to de biggest sheer."

"Are there snakes under there?" asked Lucile.

"You better b'lieve, an' rattlesnakes too."

"Mamma shouldn't lke for me to be bitten," said Lucile, in a deprecating tone; "nor would she like for them to bite *you*; come away, Zulma."

Zulma laughed at the precautions of her young mistress.

"Go 'long—I'se useter snakes! W'en I was livin' wid my tudder marster, snakes an' me useter sleep under de same bush." She took no notice of the horror-stricken visage beside her, but plunged headlong into the tangled shrubbery, and quickly filled her apron with the fragrant fruit.

She then went from one muscadine vine to another, and shook to the ground the grapes which were in reality "bursting with juice and ripeness."

"The basket is full now, let us swing," said Lucile climbing upon one of the vines which proved most convenient for that purpose. She sat upon it for some time, swaying gracefully to and fro, like a flower on its stem.

The sound of approaching steps alarmed her; she had never before been intruded upon in her ramblings; she sprang lightly from her seat and stood for a moment in a listening attitude.

"From where did you drop, child?"

Lucile gazed with astonishment into the face of a stranger who stood staring at her with equal amazement.

"From the muscadine vine, Sir," responded she, giving a literal interpretation to his question.

"Let's run, Miss Lucile, he's a 'sassiner!'" cried Zulma, standing in the background!"

But her mistress swept the curls from her moistened brow and gazed inquiringly into the stranger's face.

"And you sir—where did—*you* drop from?" asked she with a sunny smile.

"From the sky, would you suppose?"

"I know better than that," replied Lucile, emphatically, shaking her head.

"But how came you to find us out. Could you see us from the road?"

"No, but I heard you talking; you were having a merry time, eh?"

"Indeed we were, swinging and gathering muscadines."

"Miss Lucile, I say, cum away; dat man's a robber—fuss thing you know, he'll clap off yo' 'ead an' run off wid boif yo' year-ring."

The idea was so preposterous, the child broke into a merry peal of laughter.

"But you won't, though?" she asked, turning her bright countenance towards the stranger.

"Not for all the ear-rings in the world, my little friend. You may trust me!"

In truth, there was nothing in the gentleman's appearance to alarm Lucile. His attire, his deportment and the benevolent expression of his features disarmed her fears. He was very much like her own papa, she thought; only, his whiskers were grey. He, in turn, surveyed her with surprise, and speculated on her grace, her beauty and her dress—a jaconet dotted with pale blue stars, tastefully trimmed with valenciennes. He noticed too, the neatness with which her shoes were laced, and even the tiny handkerchief which protruded from her apron pocket. As he so rudely interrupted the party, he offered to assist Lucile in gathering the muscadines that had been spilt from the basket. She thanked him with a sweet, frank smile, saying:

"Now, I'm going home; shouldn't you like to come with me?"

"Thank you very much; nothing would give me more pleasure."

He had wandered out of his way; he was tired, the day was at its close, what harm could there be in accepting the child's invitation? And then, he was curious to know something of her connections: her surroundings were so incongruous with her gentility of appearance.

He thus mentally framed his excuses as he followed, leading his horse by the bridle.

Zulma, with a lowering countenance, walked at some distance behind them carrying a formidable looking club.

When they got to the bridge, the stranger paused for a moment and glanced up at the drooping boughs entwined by the thick, clustering vines.

"'Tis a real bower!" he exclaimed in admiration.

"May I tell you what it is?" asked Lucile.

"I shall be glad to know."

"A wisteria vine."

"Indeed! and how did you find out?"

"Because in spring it is covered with beautiful purple flowers; they hang all about it in great bunches. Mamma picked some of them to pieces and said they were wisterias. Can you analyze?"

"I am ashamed to confess, I cannot."

"You needn't be ashamed of it; papa himself can't."

The child bounded off from the bridge to a small elevation of land opposite.

"Do you know what *this* is?"

"A knoll, I should think."

"Well, no; this is an Indian grave; the darkeys told me so, and I come here sometimes to pray for their poor souls."

The stranger laughed outright.

Lucile stood upon the mound, abashed. Her rosebud lips formed themselves into a pout and she descended, crestfallen.

"Please forgive me, little friend; I meant no offense; but the idea of your praying for the Indians struck me as being very—funny."

"You're as bad as Zulma there; when I ask her to pray for them, she laughs too, and says she glad they're dead."

"An' I is," responded a voice in the rear.

Great was Mrs. Hunt's astonishment on beholding her daughter crossing the stile with a stranger at her heels.

"Mamma," said Lucile on reaching the house, "this is a gentleman I found on the road, near the bridge; he was lost and I asked him to come."

The view the child had taken of her *protégé* was so much like that she might have taken of a kitten or some stray animal fallen on her way, that Mrs. Hunt found it hard to control her humor.

"Madam," said the stranger, "I hope you will excuse this intrusion, and the liberty I have taken in accepting your daughter's kind invitation. My name is Davis. I was on my way to Fordoche, and was examining the features of this part of the country, when I came upon her. I must confess, the sight of such a child in a wilderness, was surprising and perplexing to a traveler.

An amused but affable smile lighted up Mrs. Hunt's sweet countenance as she answered: "It is rather late for you to resume your journey, Mr. Davis. Allow me to second my daughter's invitation by offering you a night's hospitality, if indeed, you are willing to put up with the inconveniences of pioneer life."

The gracious invitation, as may be supposed, was gratefully accepted.

"Bring out the chairs, Lucile," said Mrs. Hunt. "It is so much pleasanter out here, sir, than in the house; we generally sit here in the evening to enjoy the breeze and the rustling of the mulberry leaves overhead."

Lucile, after a moment's absence, returned, carrying on a waiter, glasses of raspberry syrup. She handed one to her guest, saying: "It is cool and nice; I've just pumped the water out of the well."

"What a very kind little girl you are, miss," replied Mr. Davis. He drank with avidity the contents of the glass.

"I was very thirsty and found your syrup delicious, Lucile."

Both Lucile and her mother thought it a treat to have a stranger to talk to, and to listen to what he had to say of other parts of the country. But after a while Mrs. Hunt arose and excused herself, leaving Lucile in charge of her guest until she ordered supper.

"I was 'frade of you w'en I fust seed you," said Zulma, approaceing with a broad grin.

"And you took me for a robber," answered Mr. Davis good humoredly.

"I did so."

"I noticed how careful you were of your own safety; you surely wouldn't have got hurt if I had happened to be one."

"Who, me? I was playin' possum; if you hed raised yo finger on Miss Lucile, I was gwine to club de life out'er you!"

"You must excuse Zulma," said Lucile, somewhat ashamed at her maid's conduct. "She does not mean to be saucy; that's her way of talking to people. Won't you walk with me to the stile?" she continued, as if to conciliate her new friend. "I'll show you a place where an old owl has built her nest. She must be setting now, for every night her neighbors come to see her and they have a terrible time of it hoo-ooing and haw-haw-ing."

"You have lugubrious neighbors, Lucile."

"Do you mean Mr. Narsis across the bayou?" Lucile asked with a puzzled expression.

"Yes, are you as sociable as the owls?"

"About the same," replied Lucile, with a merry laugh. "We often talk to each other, but we never make the fuss the owls make."

Zulma had followed the couple to the road; the idea occurred to her that this was a splendid opportunity to display her talents—musical as well as terpsichorean, and she whispered her design into Lucile's ear.

"Mr. Davis," Lucile began in a timid voice, "Zulma wants to dance for you."

"Not a war-dance, I hope," replied Mr. Davis, turning to Zulma with an amused smile. "You may go ahead, Zulma, I shall be delighted to see you dance."

Zulma did not wait for a second bidding; she walked to a level space across the road and stood for an instant erect, one foot planted before the other like a circus girl waiting for the music. On a sudden, she began singing, and a succession of brilliant airs rippled from her lips, as clear and sweet as the notes of a nightingale. She fell into the measures of one dance after another with no perceptible interruption. Her coal black eyes sparkled; her countenance lighted up with increasing delight. She flung her arms now upwards, now downwards, and twirled them above her head in graceful motions. She was like one intoxicated with the sound of her own voluptuous singing. At last; she paused and stood for a moment listening to the expiring echoes of her voice in the gloomy woods across the bayou. Twilight had vanished, and the moon's broad disc emerged from a dark outline of trees, bathing the landscape in a silvery sheen.

Mr. Davis, who had indifferently consented to look upon the dance, sat upon the stile in bewilderment. It was hard for him to realize that the brilliant and beautiful notes which still lingered on his ear, emanated from a slave living in the backwoods—a creature who, a few moments since, appeared to him the personification of stupidity.

Lucile, after a brief silence, looked up inquiringly into his face; she feared that her friend had failed to appreciate the performance.

"She sings very well, don't you think?"

"She has an *extraordinary* voice," was his reply. "Zulma, here is a quarter, you dance as well as any circus girl."

Mr. Davis could not have paid her a greater compliment, and she exclaimed with pride:

"You juss hit it marster, its frum dem I learn."

At this moment, Mr. Hunt joined the group, and extended a cordial greeting to the stranger who was to be his guest.

Within the limited space of the planter's dining-room, the family sat down to a sumptuous repast that evening.

First they tasted of the succulent trout, fresh from the cold bosom of Grosse Tete. Fowls roasted with culinary art, were served with delicious home-made jellies; then a pate, and rolls as light as sea foam appeared with a pyramid of golden butter. There was a pot of fragrant tea and a dessert of exquisitely preserved fruit, and for those who wished, a glass of cold milk, rich as cream. The guest, within the rude walls of that cabin-home, could hardly conceal his surprise at the incongruities which everywhere startled his mind. The home, he perceived, contained but three apartments. Receptions were made in the bedroom, and the meals were taken in one with barely space for the chairs and table. Another as small, furnished with a single bed, was allotted to him for the night. Notwithstanding these inconveniences, hospitality was dispensed with ease and grace, and there prevailed in the household, an atmosphere of refinement seldom found even in the homes of the wealthy.

In the morning, the traveler took his departure, carrying with him, the remembrance of a tear glittering in the eyes of

a lovely child; of a woman's sweet face, framed in the threshold of an humble cabin, and of the warm pressure of a friendly hand, given him at the stile.

* The family of creoles who had moved into the log cabin on the bank opposite Mr. Hunt's place, consisted of an old planter, wife and several grown sons. Old Mr. Narsis was a great hunter; he often came over with a haunch of venison or a brace of partridge for his little friend, "*Meez Lucie.*"

To him she was a being infinitely superior to any he had ever met, and he rendered her homage by presenting her from time to time such tokens as fell within the range of his limited circumstances.

"*La v'la la p'tite!*" he once exclaimed, as he caught a glimpse of her white garments fluttering among the thickets.

"'Ello Meez Lucie! to-morrow me bring you sum schnipes."

"Oh! never mind about killing the poor snipes, Mr. Narsis," answered the tender-hearted Lucile, bring me, instead, those turtle shells you promised me."

"W'at you wants dem shells fur, *Ma p'tite?*"

"To sow flower seeds in, Mr. Narsis."

"*Quelle idie?* You no frade, me no figit you, Meez Lucie!"

For a number of years, the Narsis family was the only one within sight of the Hunt place. Often, on warm summer evenings, Lucile and her parents sought the cool shade on the bank; here, they exchanged greetings and held friendly converse with their neighbors across the water.

It was a comfort to have them there, notwithstanding the uncongeniality of their minds; their presence was the *one social* link in that interminable solitude.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DAWSEYS—DEATH IN THE MIDST OF LIFE.

Mr. Dawsey was a West Feliciana farmer. He came to Grosse Tete about five years after Mr. Hunt, and as they were near neighbors, the two were often thrown together.

They differed widely in agricultural theories as well as in disposition.

The bluntness of Mr. Dawsey's expressions and the eccentricity of his character, made heavy demands on his neighbor's forbearance. He was in the habit of making his calls on Sunday evenings, when the weather permitted; he preferred a seat under the mulberry trees where he ensconced himself in a comfortable arm chair and smoked his pipe at leisure. He had a keen relish for a sip of peach brandy or a glass of old claret which Mr. Hunt occasionally set before him. The conversation between the two, was at times, diverting. One evening, Mr. Dawsey arrived in a mood, even more irascible than usual.

"Mr. Hunt," he began, "I've come to see you about those impudent niggers of yours; if you don't get them to mend their ways, I mean to hurt some of 'em."

"What is wrong now?" asked Mr. Hunt in a tone which plainly indicated that this was not the first complaint laid before him by the gruff old planter. "Have my hands been trespassing on your place again?"

"Not to my knowledge, though I'm sure they come sneaking in at night, whenever they have a chance; but I have come to warn you that your drivers have got into the habit of insulting me each time they pass my place."

“Is it possible!” exclaimed Mr. Hunt. “And in what manner have they insulted you, Mr. Dawsey?”

“Why, by yelling and singing and raising a h—l of a noise coming back from the river; one would believe the whole creation belonged to them. I’m not going to stand this any longer. I’m not going to have my night’s rest broke up by any such infernal racket; and I mean to put a stop to it even if I have to do it with my shotgun.”

“Your slumbers will not be disturbed again, sir, I promise you. I shall order my teamsters to curb their animal spirits when passing over your premises, though, I am sure, they have’nt the remotest idea of annoying you.”

“Tut, tut, they know very well that I don’t allow my niggers to turn my plantation into a Methodist camp. I’ll bet my head they do it to vex me.”

“But I have never objected to their singing, Mr. Dawsey, and they are in the habit of doing it, particularly when at work. ‘To tell the truth,’ continued Mr. Hunt smiling, ‘I rather like to hear them sing; it shows that they are in a good humor, and that they work with cheerful hearts.’”

Mr. Dawsey groaned. “If every planter was to follow your way of managing niggers, the country would soon go to the dogs.”

Mr. Hunt laughed. “I am considered a very successful planter, Mr. Dawsey,” my property increases in value every year, and if nothing happens, I mean to make a fortune right here, without deviating from my adopted methods of cultivation and management.”

“I reckon you will, with a streak of good luck following right behind you. You’re got the best land in the State; you haven’t lost a nigger since you commenced planting; never had sickness among them to stop work, and I’ll be hanged if you haven’t got the weather to back you, besides!”

"I am obliged to the weather, I'm sure," replied Mr. Hunt, highly amused. "I was not aware of its partiality before; on the contrary, I have been wasting my energies calculating and manœuvring in order to take every advantage of it. The absence of sickness among my negroes is due, in part, to the care I take of them."

The difference of opinion on the part of the planters did not interfere with the friendly intercourse which existed between their families.

Kate and Annie Dawsey, eight and ten years of age, were pleasant associates of Lucile's, and many were the rambles they had together searching along the bayous for spider lilies and other wild flowers in springtime, and for persimmons, may-pops and the scarlet berries of the sumach, in the fall. They returned from their jaunts with a stock of adventures which they related to Mrs. Hunt while partaking of the tempting lunch she always prepared for them—slices of ham and biscuits or buttered rolls; sometimes a pie with a pitcher of rich milk, or a plate of dainty lady fingers.

Little Katie was a sweet, blue-eyed child with rioting golden hair. Her heart was so loving and tender, she would mourn for days, over the loss of a pet rabbit, or weep at the death of a cow or any other domestic animal. She was devotedly attached to Lucile, and her pale, delicate face was often laid in loving contact with the rosy cheeks of her friend.

Nannie was less lovely than her sister, and of a more independent nature. The little girls had never been sent to school and their home education had been so deficient, especially when compared to Lucile's, that she obtained permission from her parents to teach them as far as her capacity extended. On the first morning she was to assume her duties, Lucile awaited with impatience the arrival of her pupils. In

due time, they made their appearance, staggering beneath the weight of their school bags, which had been well filled with a miscellaneous assortment of books and pamphlets culled from a decrepid library. Happily, their young teacher was able to supply them with books and other articles necessary for the pursuit of their studies.

Though an enthusiastic teacher, Lucile was not a disciplinarian. It was not an unusual custom with her to suspend her classes for an hour's romp, or for the purpose of ascertaining the cause of a disturbance in the poultry yard. But, alas! a sadder and more lasting interruption was to break up her little school.

On a warm, sunny day in October, her pupils arrived in a high state of excitement.

"Oh! Lucile," exclaimed Nannie, "papa's commenced ginning, and he says we must all come to the gin after we get through with our lessons."

"You too, Lucile!" exclaimed little Katie throwing her arms around her teacher's neck.

"We are going to have lots of fun playing lost in the snow," said Nannie, fanning her cheek with her sunbonnet. "Kate'll be the lost child and will lay down in the lint-room until she is covered up with lint; then you and me will hunt her up, Lucile."

"But who'll be the dog?" asked Katie, the blood mounting to her cheeks with pleasurable anticipations.

"I'll be the dog," replied Nannie; "and the way I shake you out of that cotton will make you wish you had never been lost."

Kate opened wide her appealing eyes. "Oh! Nannie," she cried. "Let's ride on the lever instead; it's such fun."

“Nannie shall not tease you, dear,” said Lucile, drawing the child towards her; “and we are going in now to study our lessons, or else I shall be awfully cross and mean.”

The young teacher assumed an air of dignity and opened her atlas; the little girls followed her example, and for a time bent over their books in earnest study. Lucile had never tried to wheedle her pupils into knowledge; but had, by some happy device of her own, awakened their interest in their books, and they seldom missed their lessons. Little Katie, especially, was as docile and as sensitive as a fawn; but to-day, her thoughts wandered off, and her laughing eyes looked into Lucile’s with unutterable expressions.

“Well, Katie, tell it,” said her teacher smiling. “I see you are dying to say something.”

“It’s about the gin, Lucile. Won’t it be nice riding on the lever? I can see the big wheel turning and me sitting on it going around?”

“You had better jump down and study your lesson,” suggested Nannie.

“Yes, Katie, I advise you to put off the ride until after class” remarked Lucile; “or else I shall keep you in penance.”

Lucile had never had occasion to threaten before, and the rebuke was too much for the little fluttering heart. Katie burst into tears.

“Why you are the sweetest, the cutest and dearest child in the world,” cried Lucile straining Katie to her heart; “and I don’t know what made me say what I did. You need not study if you don’t want to. Katie; that’s the way I feel sometimes, and mamma sends me for a walk. Here’s your bonnet. Let us go; you will feel ever so much better after a little ramble.

It was a beautiful evening and the sky was of the deepest azure. Lucile and the Dawsey children, on their way to the ginhouse, came near dislocating their necks trying to count the crows and other birds soaring across the cloudless vault. Katie followed with eager eyes one of the birds, which, in a few seconds, seemed to have been swallowed up in the upper deep. "Oh! Lucile!" she cried in great excitement, "one of them has gone to heaven! Don't you wish you could go too?"

"Yes indeed, Katie, I should like to go that way; but people must die before they can go to heaven, you know."

"Is it hard to die Lucile? Tell me about it."

"Don't ask me, dear. I have never seen anyone die, nor never wish to."

Katie's lovely eyes once more sought the blue dome, and her sweet, childish face grew sober trying to concentrate her thoughts on a subject that had never before presented itself to her mind.

The effort extinguished, as it were, the exuberance of her feelings and hushed her accustomed prattle. Lucile observed the change that had come over her little pupil.

"What is Katie thinking about now, I wonder?"

"Something dreadful hard, Lucile; about how people get to heaven."

"Well, you need not rack your little brain doing that, child; you are too young to think about death."

"What *is* death, Lucile?" asked she, fixing her expressive eyes on her young teacher.

"O Katie, who can tell! one must die first to know. It is a mystery one cannot solve in this life."

"Well then, what *is* life? I want to know."

"What strange questions you do ask," cried Lucile impatiently; "I am not smart enough to know such things."

Ah! little Katie, had Lucile the gift of prophecy, she would have applied to you this answer: "It is even as a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away."

The children, on reaching the gate, tumbled through the bars and scampered across the lot to the cotton gin. Then, there was a general rush for a seat on the lever. Lucile and her companions were joined by little Jimmie Dawsey, who sat astride one of the long beams and shouted with delight. They amused themselves tumbling each other off and then racing and struggling to secure their seats again.

A couple of mules tugged at each end of the lever by which the band-wheel was propelled and the gin put in operation.

With a swaggering gait, Dick, the young darkie, followed the mules, cracking his rawhide whip and making himself hoarse abusing them. He threatened and shouted and discharged upon them a continuous volley of pent-up wrath.

"W'at de matter wid you now, Dolly? 'Stid ov pullin', you gwine to sleep, hey? I'll let you know, dis yere no time fur to shirk, sur; and I got sumfin' fur to wake you up, I is. You Peet! move up dere, will ye? W'en I lay dis yere hide on yo' back you'll step roun' little more lively."

Poor Dick was but a child himself with human frailties, and he cast longing looks at the merry band disporting around the wheel. Once, he stepped aside to watch them at leisure. His steely black eyes glinted beneath their dust-powdered lashes, and from time to time, he stifled his hilarity in his old coon-skin cap. But he was soon recalled to his post by the angry voice of his master ordering him to "drive up the mules." Dick cracked his whip and fell once more into his vociferous monologues. "De minite I takes my eye off dese yere mules, dey shirks. Move up dere Nancy! Did you ebber

see such a lot befo'? I ain't gwine to stand dis much longer, min' ye. I's gettin' mad, I is. You Peet! I sees you. W'en I gi' you a tace of dis yere rawhide, you'll mine yo' bizness, I bet you. Git up dere! git up dere, mules!"

With a whirring sound and accelerating speed, the great wheel plunged into space, and the low humming of the busy gin, mingled with the children's prattle and laughter. The slanting rays of the setting sun darted across the circle where they were at play, and tipped with gold a cloud of whirling dust; in the midst of it, the quivering form of a child dropped under the ponderous wheel.

"O Lord!" cried Lucile. "Katie has passed under the wheel!" Running up to her, she lifted the limp body from the ground. With frantic efforts, Dick contrived to check his mules; Mr. Dawsey and the hands employed at the gin rushed to the spot. All was confusion; the air was filled with the children's cries and lamentations. Lucile trembled like an aspen leaf beneath her precious burden, which lay like a bruised flower in her arms. No tear escaped her eyelids; no cry gave utterance to her anguish. The wretched father, with a groan, fell upon his knees beside her, and taking up the tiny hand which lay quivering in the dust, felt the failing pulse. "Don't move her—for God's sake—she's dying!" came from his rigidly compressed lips.

Lucile raised her colorless face and glanced at his horror-stricken countenance; her own courage faltered, and it was only by a supreme effort that she overcame the strange sensations which crept through her frame and threatened to overpower her. The head of the sweet child rested upon Lucile's arm; a stream of blood trickled slowly from the pale lips. She made several attempts to open her eyes, but her lids, heavy with the dew of Death, instantly dropped over the blue orbs;

spasmodic fits frequently shook her delicate body. These indications of the child's suffering and approaching dissolution, pierced with anguish the hearts of those who witnessed her agony. In her intense grief, Lucile bent over her and tried to frame a prayer, a supplication to God to spare the life of her little friend. But her lips were parched, and she found it impossible to divert her thoughts from the palid and gasping figure cradled in her arms. In the midst of her vain endeavors, she became sensible of a sudden relaxation in the form she clasped. The golden head fell peacefully upon her breast; the pure spirit had winged its flight, and Lucile, for the first time, *looked upon Death.*

Frantic with grief and terror, Mrs. Dawsey lifted from Lucile's lap, the body of her beloved child.

"Oh! my darling, is this you?" she cried, wiping with the corner of her apron the dust and blood which disfigured the once beautiful face. "You cannot be dead my precious!" she cried, clasping the child's yet warm fingers within her own icy hand. "God could never be so cruel to me!" She then felt for the pulseless heart; its fearful stillness convinced her of the awful truth. With a piercing scream, she clasped to her bosom the pale clay, and gave vent to her feelings in sharp and agonizing shrieks. Her husband stood for a moment, leaning heavily against the murderous wheel. Great drops of perspiration oozed from his temples; every faculty of his being seemed paralyzed. His eyes wandered around to where his children and some of the hands were buddled together, wailing and sobbing; then—they rested on the white, stony face of the brave girl who still sat in the dust, bathed in the gore of his child. He staggered to her side and extending his hand to her, said in a husky tone: "Come." The sound of his voice broke the spell which had hitherto kept her senses in thrall;

she started to her feet like one awakened from a dream. Mr. Dawsey silently led her from the scene of death into the open air.

In the rear of Mr. Dawsey's garden, and beyond the palings, a stately ash washed its roots in the sluggish water of a small bayon. A portion of its branches overshadowed a weedy corner of the garden; it was here, they dug poor Katie's grave.

When they laid her little coffin down upon the dried grass, the evening winds rustled among the silvery leaves of the tree, and scattered them into her open grave. Mr. Hunt who was to read the burial service, laid a handful of pure white roses upon the casket; they were a tribute from his wife to the child's sweet memory. Mrs. Hunt had remained with Lucile, who was delirious with fever and from the shock her nervous system had sustained the day before.

No voice intoned a hymn, no bell tolled its sorrow. when Katie was laid in her lonely grave. The negroes on the place came up softly to gaze for the last time, upon her angelic face, and their sturdy frames shook with sobs of genuine grief, as they turned away from the little form stretched like a marble figure on the parlor table. The anguish of her parents, the tears of the children and her friends, were the testimonials which proclaimed how dear to all was the lovely one thus snatched from earth in the morning of her life.

"A lovelier flower, on earth, was never sown."

"Such was her end, a calm release,
No clinging to this mortal clod;
She closed her eyes and stood in peace
Before a smiling God."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DAWN OF A NEW LIFE.

THE moss-draped forests which, for some ages, had cumbered the earth, and overshadowed the banks of Grosse Tete, rapidly disappeared beneath the leveling axe of the settler, and the waters of the bayou, went dancing in the sunlight, past luxuriant fields and substantial bridges. The heavens were no longer obscured by the smoke of burning canebrakes. The creack and rumble of ox teams, instead of the echoing thud of the axe, now greeted the traveler's ear. Prosperity followed in the wake of the plow-share. Every arpent of land, from the Hunt place to Fodorce, was now under cultivation. Mr. Davis, the stranger whom Lucile had befriended, returned to Grosse Tete, and purchased a large tract of land in her father's neighborhood. His wife and children were cordially welcomed by his former hosts, and a warm friendship was soon established between the two families. Thus Lucile and her mother were once more thrown in contact with people of their own station and of congenial minds, and a new phase of existence dawned upon them. Strange to say, they accepted the transition with feelings of joy, mingled with regret. The old life had been one of tranquil and uninterrupted happiness to the social exiles. The circle of Lucile's acquaintances was now so much enlarged that she selected among the number a friend according to her own heart. Her choice fell upon Rosanna Davis. She was older than Lucile, but possessed a gentle, yielding disposition which exactly suited Lucile's ardent and impulsive nature. Herbert Davis, Rosanna's eldest brother, was a hand-

some, promising lad a year older than Lucile. His father was preparing to send him to the University of Mississippi, then a flourishing institution, greatly patronized by Southern planters. As Lucile herself was to leave home for school, there sprung up between them sympathies which soon ripened into friendship. From her earliest childhood, Lucile had been constantly reminded that she was to be sent to the Convent to complete her education. But when the time came for this project to be put in execution, she gave way to her grief and manifested a strong disposition to resist her father's wishes. Her mother, in sympathizing with her, added desolation to the scene. Mr. Hunt was inflexible. He explained to Lucile the necessity of attending school, in order to educate herself in music and drawing, both of which she was anxious to learn. He reminded her of their projected visit to Virginia, where she would have the opportunity of immortalizing on canvass, the mountain scenery in the vicinity of his home. He represented besides, the many advantages she would derive from other studies which neither of her parents were prepared to teach her. His arguments, combined with the pain she felt in disappointing her parents at last prevailed, and she submitted to their decision without further remonstrance.

"Do not mind me, papa," she said with pitiful resignation. "I have anticipated this ordeal a hundred times before; but it is all over now, and I am ready to go whenever you wish to send me!"

Lucile received from her grandmother her "*corvert*," an elegant silver cup with her name engraved upon it in a wreath of pansies. *Grandpère* sent her two golden eagles for her pin money, and a rose wood work-box, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Old Mr. Narsis came over with a bag of peanuts "fur Meez Lucie." He expatiated on the fine qualities of his gift. They

were "*w'ite an' clean*," he had washed them himself in the bayou and dried them on the roof of his corn house. She would find many of them in quartette in the pods, and they were as sweet as almonds.

"Dey keep you mighty long time, I frade, Meez Lucie," he said, shaking his grey locks. "May be, w'en you come back, you fin' ole Narsis dun dead."

"Oh! you must not say that," exclaimed Lucile, in an anxious tone. "*Nobody* must die, while I am away."

"*Dieu est le maître ma p'tite*," answered the old man with a smile full of sadness; "an' ole Narsis, he dun make 'is time. He was dare w'en de chevreuil an' de Choctaw Injuns fill de woods, an' w'en de peeps on Fausse Reiver eat duck an' sarcelle all de winta, an' salt 'im up in barrel."

"That must have been a good time for the hunters, Mr. Narsis," observed Lucile.

"Good time fer all de peeps, p'tite," he answered, rising and extending his rough, horny hand towards her. "Adieu, *pauvre p'tite; bon voyage*, an' don't furgit yo' ole fren'."

He passed the sleeve of his old blanket coat across his eyes, and abruptly left the room. A few moments later the thud of his oars smote the ears of his friends.

"Poor old Mr. Narsis," sighed Lucile, "I hope he's not going to die, mamma."

"Don't borrow trouble, darling," answered her mother. "Try always to look upon the bright side of life."

"But—mamma," answered Lucile, bursting into tears; "there is—no bright side for me to look upon—now—that I am going away from home!"

"Let us go over there, to the new house," said Lucile to Rosanna, on the eve of her departure for the Convent. "My heart is breaking, and I *must have* a cry somewhere out of mamma's sight."

The two friends silently wended their way towards the spot indicated. The building in course of construction stood on a high point of land formed by the bend of the bayou, which I once said, ran back of the house. Mr. Hunt had named it "Back Creek," in remembrance of a creek which traversed his father's estate, in the Shenandoah Valley. The girls stopped on their way to examine the structure. The carpenters were busy at work, and the wind came whistling viciously through the open spaces and scaffolding. They hastened away to a group of pecan trees at the edge of the bayou, and in order to shield themselves from the cold blasts which assailed them, they took refuge behind a pile of lumber where they ensconced themselves for a confidential chat. It was a cold, gloomy day in November, and the two friends watched for a moment the sear leaves as they whirled mournfully among the shavings, covering the ground then, finally, heaped themselves together in a common grave.

"They remind me of children," sighed Lucile, "who are torn from their homes to be tossed about in the world."

"Don't think of those ugly, dead leaves," answered Rosanna, "look rather, at that stately building over there. When you return in August, it will be ready to receive you; how pleasant it will be to live in so lovely a home!"

"I shall not love it half as much as that dear, old cabin over yonder," replied she, and the tears welled from her eyes.

"You may think so now; but I am sure, the proudest and happiest days of your life will be spent on this very spot."

"My happy days are over!" wailed the girl, bursting into tears.

Rosanna drew her within her arms.

"You said you had come for a cry, and you are keeping your word with a vengeance. You will have *me* crying next."

She spoke in a choking voice and furtively wiped the tears which fell from her own eyes. "You must not take on so, dearie, it does you no good and grieves your parents. It is hard enough for them to give you up, without adding to their sorrow by acting as you do. You must have some consideration for their own feelings, dear Lucile."

"You are a wise, good girl, Rosanna," said she, passing her arms around her friend's waist, and laying her head against her shoulder. "I am going to be reasonable and unselfish, even if I die in the attempt; but dear Rosanna," here Lucile broke into sobs, "I came here to have a cry."

After Lucile had indulged in a comfortable fit of weeping, she once more reverted to the subject nearest to her heart. They talked until Zulma came to remind them of the inclemency of the weather, until then ignored by both, in the fervor of their last *tête à tête*.

It was Lucile's last evening at home.

The fire on the hearth, cracked merrily, as if to cheer and distract the little group sitting within the radius of its ruddy light. Mr. Hunt held a paper before him under pretense of reading. Lucile sat in her rocker diligently employed in stitching the ribbons on a couple of alpaca aprons required in her Convent outfit. She made superhuman efforts to check the tears, which from time to time, rolled down unbidden upon her work. Even in her extreme sadness, she noticed the brilliancy of light and color scintillating from the limpid drops which she repeatedly shook from the cloth. Woman-like, Mrs. Hunt had found solace in completing her preparations for the morrow's journey. Zulma sat on a low stool at Lucile's feet. Since the accident at the bayou, Mr. Hunt had yielded to his daughter all authority over the slave. Her loyalty to her young mistress was proof of the lenity of her rule. Poor Zulma was about to

undergo her first trial. In the generosity of her heart, she struggled to suppress her own grief, in order to divert Lucile's mind from the morrow's ordeal. When occasion required, she handed to her mistress the scissors, or her thread, turning on the sly to wipe away the tears which blurred her vision. In spite of her own distress, she occasionally continued to make cheerful remarks, which dissipated for a time the signs of sorrow lingering about the sweet countenance of her dear little mistress.

"I 'clare, you *is* gwins to ride in one ov dem fine boats, Miss Lucile."

"What if your prediction comes true, and it explodes whilst we are on board?"

"You need'nt 'spect dat, chile; dey tell me dem boats quit bustin' sense I lef!"

"And how does it happen, I wonder?" asked Lucile, looking archly into Zulma's anxious face.

"Well—I yere—de captin's got de upper 'and of 'em. Boats aint haf as obstropus as dey useter be; dey aint haf as wile."

"I am glad to know they have been tamed."

"I's mighty glad too, but dey's plenty ov 'em *niver* 'arm nobody, little mistis; dere's de 'Southerin Belle' an' de 'Capitol' and de 'Quitman.' "

"We are going on a boat called the 'Natchez.' "

"You *is*? I dun seed de Natchez; she's a mighty fine boat, I kin tell you; an' I never year'd no one speak agin de Natchez. I'm sho' she's gwine to take you straight to de Convint."

"You once told me that boats were very treacherous, and exploded without giving any warning."

“Oh, dat useter be dere way ov doing long time ago!” replied Zulma, gazing abstractedly in a mass of glowing coals; “but I yeard dey got de upper ’and ov dem now.”

“I wonder if Aunt Polly will ever get the upper hand of you, Zulma?”

“Go way, little mistis; I’s a proud nigger you see me dere; an, I aint gwine to let anybody rule me ’cept it be you,” she whispered, casting a side glance in the direction where sat her master.

“Zulma, I want you to be good while I am gone; promise me.”

“I can’t tell you no, little mistis; befo’ de Lawd, I promis’ you to hole my sass in till you come back.”

“Very well, I shall depend on your word.”

CHAPTER IX.

NEW SCENES.

ON reaching the suburbs of Waterloo, Lucile contemplated the scene around her with eyes expanding with curiosity. She saw in the hazy distance, an outline of dark blue forests, which her papa informed her marked the opposite shore of the great "Father of Waters." Everything about the place, seemed full of interest to her; she had so often heard Zulma boast of the magnificence of the town and its superior advantages over Grosse Tete. Sure enough, there were the houses—two stories high, though sadly lacking in the splendor ascribed to them; many were in need of a coat of paint, and others were on the high road to decadence. On their way through the village, Lucile recognized a number of ox teams from Grosse Tete. She had often seen them before, passing along the bayou with their immense loads of cotton and sugar. Waterloo was, at that time, the most important landing-place in the parish. All the crops from the back country, were hauled there for shipping, and at seasons of the year, the boats delivered at its landing, the freight destined for the flourishing planters of Grosse Tete.

"And is *this* the Mississippi river?" exclaimed Lucile, standing upon the levee and looking intently up and down the mighty stream, which tumbled its waters at her feet—the river discovered by DeSoto? "How well I remember the picture in which his men are represented plunging his body into the water! I don't like its appearance, mamma; there's nothing attractive about it."

"I think it is a noble looking stream," replied her mother. "See how majestically it runs. Those immense trees drifting on its current are on their way to the sea."

"Oh! mamma it makes me afraid to watch them; they look like living things the current is dragging away."

"Do not waste your sympathy upon them, darling," replied her father, "they will be caught before they reach the mouth of the river, and turned into firewood."

The horizon in both North and South was flecked with smoke rising from the stacks of boats. There was a steamer in sight, but so far away, its movement was imperceptible. As Lucile gazed upon the boat, she recalled an event of her childhood, her fall into the bayou and her rescue. She imagined that her mother, likewise, was retrospecting; she glanced furtively into her face. A deep crimson overspread her cheeks, and she turned abruptly aside to hide her perturbation. The boat was now approaching; it was a stern-wheel, and continued to hug the opposite shore. Lucile could form but a faint idea of its details. The sun was then dipping behind a bank of grey clouds, and the north wind blew cold in their faces. Mr. Hunt persuaded his wife and daughter to return to the house, as the boat in which they were to travel was not due until nine o'clock that night. They walked back to the large brick building, the lower story of which served as a store and warehouse. The proprietor invited them upstairs into a comfortable parlor, where a cheerful fire burned in the grate. One of the clerks brought them a plate of apples. As they had taken nothing since dinner, the fruit was eaten with considerable relish. Lucile, with her head reclining on her mother's knee, had just dozed off into a comfortable nap, when she was suddenly aroused by the loud blowing of a boat. She started to her feet, her mind filled with vague apprehensions.

At the same moment, her father's voice was heard from the staircase. "Hurry up Elise, put on your wraps, the boat is coming."

A general stir was perceptible about the place. Boys of both colors were running towards the levee, carrying bundles and lanterns; negro men trundled wheelbarrows before them; and others drove carts and drays through the breach in the levee. There was hurry, confusion, loud talking and indiscriminate remarks among the crowd.

"Dat boat ahead of time, ain't she?" asked one of the darkies perched upon a pile of cotton bales.

"She is dat," answered another; "but she know she got a load to take offer dis yere landin'."

"Sbe gwine to take mos' an hour to load up."

"Law! jis look at dat pile of lasses barls."

"I wish one of dem barls would take a notion to buss!" remarked one of the boys, kicking at the innocent object of his spite.

"I rudder see de *boat* blow up."

"Not me, I'd be skeered."

"Yere she come! look attar jes' a skimmin'! She mind me of 'eaven."

"You nebber been dere, Jim."

"But I'se a gwine sum dese days."

"Git out! dat's all de 'eaven you gwine to see; white folks ain't gwine to let you in."

"Ain't she a blazzer!"

On reaching the levee, Lucile beheld before her, in mid-stream, a "real—live—boat." The spectacle struck her dumb with wonder and admiration. She gazed in rapture upon the magnificent thing moving onward in a blaze of light and beauty. How inadequate had been Zulma's description of a steamboat!

From bow to stern the craft was simply superb—a floating palace radiant in the light which streamed from a long array of chandeliers. With spontaneous grace, she turned her prow shoreward, swaying from side to side as she glided on the waters with swift and majestic motions.

“O how beautiful!” cried Lucile; “she is like an enchanted palace, floating on the water.”

Suddenly, there was a clanging of bells; the boat, with tremendous heavings, straightened herself and began to discharge her steam with deafening uproar. The tall chimneys belched forth clouds of black smoke, and in the glare of the furnace fires, the swarthy crew appeared in sight. The flames from the torch baskets flared up wildly, flinging out a shower of sparks which fell in the foaming waves below. Above the noise, the clatter and rumblings, the voice of the mate arose, harsh and predominant.

“Hurry up, hurry up there—you black scoundrels!—pitch in with that plank will you? What are you waiting for? Instead of standing there losing time, why don’t you load up and be ready the minute the boat lands, you lazy rascals?” “Don’t you see that pile of freight there for Waterloo? Straighten that stage there so the ladies can pass.” And the poor devils actually plunged into the cold mud, dragging after them the heavy gang-plank. Their outlandish outcries added to the terror of the scene. Lucile clung to her father’s arm, in genuine fright. To her, the once beautiful boat, had been transformed into a monster, breathing forth fire and destruction, ready to overwhelm them in a direful catastrophe. She glanced up at the crowded guards. Oh! heavens; there were hundreds of human beings, unconscious of the disaster which awaited them. These were the reflections which transfixed the girl to the spot; and it was with some difficulty that her father

persuaded her to descend the levee. Mr. Hunt led his daughter onto the forecastle, past the heaving engine, up the reeking stairs and midway into the ladies' cabin, before she raised her eyes or comprehended the situation. On glancing up, she beheld for the first time, all the splendor of the converging vista which opened before her—the receding cabin, its carvings, scrolls and golden devices; its filigree work and rich paintings; the handsome furniture and the carpets upon which she feared to tread. At the upper end of the magnificent tunnel, an elegant mirror reflected the lights of a long row of chandeliers, which hung resplendent in glittering showers of glass drops. From her tenderest years, Lucile was in the habit of elevating her heart to God in every emergency. In the splendor of her surroundings, her thoughts sped like arrows to the mercy seat with a half muttered petition for the preservation of the boat. Then, a feeling of peace and security succeeded the anxieties which had assailed her on coming aboard, and she gazed with unsuppressed delight at the passengers and the novel scene around her. An hour later, the Hunt family sat at a table spread with a tempting repast. Lucile, with apparent cheerfulness, commented on her late experiences.

“Have I been a disgrace to you, dear papa?” she asked, looking up apprehensively into her father's face.

“No, darling,” he replied. I made allowances for a little girl brought up in the woods, you know; I dare say you will, in a short time, adapt yourself to the ways of civilized life.”

Lucile was here thrown with the *élite* of Southern society, and she witnessed much which pleased and interested her. She was charmed with the listless grace and fascinating manners of elegantly gowned women, who lounged on cushioned seats, discoursing on topics beyond the comprehension of her unworldly and untutored mind. In their midst, a bevy of lovely, chil-

dren gamboled over the gorgeous carpet. Pert waiting maids stood at the stateroom doors, ready to obey orders. Black nurses carried about precious bits of humanity half smothered in laces and flannels. A set of young people hovered around the piano and enlivened the scene with music and song. It was with reluctance that Lucile withdrew from the brilliant salon for the retirement of her stateroom. The novelty of her situation had, in a measure, soothed the pain which gnawed at her heart. But in darkness and solitude, her mind once more reverted to the morrow's trial, and she lay for hours pondering and listening to the uproar of waters under the wheel; to the clanging of chains and the throbbing of the great engine below. A few hours before dawn, fatigue overpowered her bewildered senses, and her tearful lashes fell heavily and permanently upon her pale cheeks. When Lucile and her parents took their seats at the breakfast table on the following morning, she surveyed with childish curiosity the bright array of glass and silverware, the snowy napery and exquisite service which decorated the board. She cast a quick, significant glance at her mother, who comprehended instantly the purport of the message, and responded by the same telegraphy.

"It is indeed, beautiful!"

She then ventured to examine the strange faces around her, without once suspecting that *she* herself, was an object of interest to a number of persons at the table. Her sweet face, her frank and intellectual countenance, and above all, her bird-like shyness, were subjects of comments among the passengers. At some distance opposite, two elderly ladies from St. Louis, sat at their morning's repast; they had already partaken of a hearty breakfast when the Hunt family made their appearance, and the attention of the staid couple was at once arrested. The younger of the two leveled her glasses and stared at the group.

"What a sweet looking girl!" she remarked to her companion.

"I should think so," responded she, scrutinizing the party referred to; "those two must be her parents; the child resembles her mother, only she has her father's fine eyes."

"She would have been just as fortunate had she inherited those of her mother—they are as luminous as stars."

"Upon the whole, they are the most genteel looking people I ever met. I wonder who they are? Ask Mr. Thompson."

The lady with the eyeglasses turned to the gentleman on the left: "Pray excuse me for interrupting you sir, but Margerite and I are really curious to know who that gentleman is over there—the one talking to the little girl dressed in Blue?"

"His name is Hunt," replied the person addressed.

"But who is he—a congressman?"

"What puts such a notion into your head?" asked Mr. Thompson, laughing.

"Why, because he has such a distinguished appearance—so striking and '*comme il faut*,' as they say in French."

"Mr. Hunt is a planter from Pointe Coupee; those two are his wife and daughter," explained Mr. Thompson.

"A planter!" ejaculated the lady: "who would have thought so!"

"My dear Madam, one would think you underate that class of people; why the name of "*planter*," especially in Pointe Coupee, is, I may say, a cognomen—a name synonymous with wealth, culture and the highest social standing. Many of these planters have magnificent estates, keep a retinue of servants and entertain in a princely style. The education they give to their children is never complete without a tour through Europe. Indeed, they are personages of so much importance that the captains of steamboats will sometimes delay half an

hour at a landing for one of these potentates to get through with his dinner. No wonder; some of them ship a thousand bales of cotton or an equal number of hogsheads of sugar."

The ladies eyed with increasing interest the subjects of their discussion.

"I should like to know," said one of them, "whether *this* one lives in a mansion and dispenses hospitality in the style you mentioned."

"I am under the impression," replied her neighbor, "that Mr. Hunt is a man of wealth and position; he receives a great deal of attention from the officers of the boat."

"It is certainly the most distinguished looking family I have ever met," reiterated the lady, rising from her seat and casting a lingering glance at the unsuspecting objects of her admiration.

Lucile and her mother formed many pleasant acquaintances during the rest of their journey. They were spending their time so agreeably, that they beheld with regret, the termination of their voyage. The boat's loud signal for the Convent landing, awakened new and conflicting emotions in the bosom of the sensitive girl. She stood with her mother on the rear guards, watching with heightened color for the first glimpse of the Convent. As the boat swung around for the landing, a distant view of the white pile emerged in graceful and harmonious outlines. There it was at last—that Convent so long and strongly associated with the hopes and fears of her childhood. It loomed grandly before them—a seat of learning, a sanctuary of virtue, and the asylum of pure souls. How pleasant it would have been, had they come only for a visit to this lovely place! She was so well acquainted with Convent rules, she had heard so much of the good nuns and the peaceful lives the inmates led within those white walls. But the sight of it

reminded her of the separation in store for her, and her bosom heaved so distressingly that she clasped her hands over it to still the pulsations of her heart. A forest of trees, stripped of their foliage, formed a sombre background and brought in relief the details of the palatial structure. The long galleries and clustered columns of the main building, formed a charming combination with the two wings, and added to the beauty and majesty of that peculiar style of architecture. The mellow autumn sun gilded the cross which surmounted one of the wings and indicated the house of prayer. A magnificent garden extended from the marble steps to the white fence. Graceful walks and alleys fringed with privet and roses, intersected the *parterre*. A variety of tropical plants mingled their verdure with the cedar and oleander, and suggested rambles and pleasant gatherings beneath their classic shades. Two shrines, like miniature gothic temples, lent an air of elegance to the grounds. But the loveliness of this stately abode contributed nothing towards cheering the heart of Lucile. She followed sadly and reluctantly the Convent porter who conducted visitors from the levee to the stone-paved entrance leading to the Convent parlors.

CHAPTER X.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

A PORTIERE, tall, dark and cadaverous, answered Mr. Hunt's summons at the bell. Her sombre habit and melancholly aspect awed Lucile, and she involuntarily shrunk from her as from an unearthly apparition. The nun gravely nodded to the visitors as she held open the door which led into the vestibule. After cautiously turning the key in the lock, she invited them to enter the spacious parlor.

"Will you have the goodness to send to me Mother Alchenar?" asked Mrs. Hunt of the sad-faced portress.

"Give me your name, please," she asked in an almost inaudible voice.

"Pardon me, I was once a pupil here, and I wish to surprise Mother Alchenar."

The mournful eyes gazed with awakened curiosity into the speaker's countenance; for an instance they glowed in their sockets like stars receding into space. "I do not remember you," she remarked in French. "You must have been here before I entered;" and the phantom-like form softly vanished from the apartment.

"What a ghostly figure!" exclaimed Mr. Hunt, seating himself upon one of the stiff sofas lining the glossy walls. "Do all the nuns assume such melancholy airs?"

"Indeed, no," replied his wife, "they are, on the contrary, the happiest and most cheerful looking people in the world."

"Oh! Mamma," cried Lucile, "I do hope she will never be my teacher."

"You need have no fears, dear, she is the portière, you see, and has nothing else to do but to attend the bell and say her prayers."

"She is a sort of St. Peter, then," suggested the child, looking brightly into her mother's face.

"Yes, truly; for I believe all pupils of the Sacred Heart are candidates for heaven."

In the course of the session, someone related to Lucile the history of the sad-faced religious. . Many of the nuns still remembered Marie Daquin, a young girl, tall and lithesome, whose black eyes sparkled with mischief and merriment. Even during the study hours, her teachers found it difficult to subdue her exuberant spirits, or suppress her untimely laughter. Her frolicsome habits and lively disposition were the causes of her losing many a coveted prize, and of being despoiled of the honors repeatedly conferred upon her more tractable companions. Notwithstanding her waywardness, the girl was intuitively pious. Each time she entered the confessional, her handkerchief was bedewed with tears of repentance, shed over venial faults, and each recreation found her bending over her slate, expiating transgressions over which she had abundantly wept. The girls were shocked and scandalized when, several times, she announced her predilection for the religious life.

"Why, Marie!" they would exclaim, "how dare you? You are not *even* a 'Ribbon!'" alluding to a class of girls who wore this badge of honor. Thus reprimanded, the poor child would suppress for a time, the aspirations of her soul. She left the convent with the secret hope of returning shortly to embrace her chosen vocation. But on her arrival home, she found her father suffering from some insidious disease, which, for a number of year, had been undermining his con-

stitution. His physicians were unable to relieve him, and he was reduced to a condition which demanded the constant attention of his wife and daughter. The health of the former yielded to the harrassing fatigue entailed upon her, and in time, tended to develop consumption, a hereditary disease in the family. Mr. Daquin's death occurred seven years after his daughter had left the convent. During his long and distressing illness, she had nursed him with tender devotion, and had denied herself all the pleasures congenial to persons of her age. Immediately after her father's death, a burden still heavier fell upon her shoulders. She saw her mother perishing by degrees in the grip of another hopeless malady, and during fifteen years she watched her mother's sufferings and administered to her wants. At the end of that time her youth had vanished; and with it, her grace of form and the lustre of her beauty. She was now left free to follow her inclinations for the religious life; but she had watched so long by the bedside of the sick and dying, and had become so accustomed to her cross, that she seemed to linger in its shadow. Her former desire predominated, however, and after a time she retraced her steps to the home of her happy girlhood, and laid at the foot of the altar, her broken heart and withered youth. And thus it was, that time had failed to remove the traces which years of unbroken gloom and sorrow had imparted to her physiognomy.

The portress had not been tardy in delivering her message; the "Mistress General" soon appeared at the threshold. Though somewhat advanced in years, her deportment was still strikingly graceful and lady-like. Her sweet, intellectual features lighted up with a benevolent smile, as she advanced to meet the strangers. Mrs. Hunt hastened to her and warmly grasped her hand.

"Mother Alchenar, do you not know me?"

The gentle nun gazed intently into the upturned face before her; her mind reverted to memory's gallery, thickly crowded with girlish faces, and a passing frown ruffled her serene brow, in her effort to single out a particular one among them. Inadvertently she glanced to where Lucile stood watching the result of the interview. Something in the girl's expression awakened the dormant faculties of her mind, for a sudden flash of light illuminated her countenance, and she exclaimed with joyful readiness:

"Why, this is Elise Lafitte!"

Clasping warmly to her bosom, the hands of her former pupil, she imprinted on either cheek a fervent, religious caress.

Too full of emotion for utterance, Mrs. Hunt gazed, through her tears, into those clear, lustrous eyes which Time had so kindly ignored.

"I am glad you recognized me, Mother, even though it required such an effort on your part."

"I was not prepared for the personal change in you, my child; Nevertheless, I can read your character, and can vouch for its integrity; although you have been in conflict with the world, it has not spoiled the qualities of your heart."

"You have judged me rightly, Mother," answered Mrs. Hunt; "now that I find myself in convent walls once more, and behold your familiar face, I almost imagine myself a pupil again under the sweet influence of your authority. But see," continued she, turning to Lucile and beckoning to her, "I have brought you another Elise to perpetuate my memory."

Lucile was touched by the warm reception tendered her by her mother's old friend, and notwithstanding her timidity, she found herself in a few moments on the best of terms with the good nun. Mr. Hunt was equally pleased with her; he

was lost in admiration of her candor, her good sense and other noble traits of character. He now understood how the natural qualifications of his wife had been so admirably developed and perfected, and he sincerely trusted that the same benign influence would be exercised over the mind and heart of his darling child.

The party sat for an hour, conversing pleasantly, on topics both worldly and conventual. Mother Alchenar had much to relate of the changes which had taken place, and the events which had transpired at the convent since Mrs. Hunt's pupilage. The superioress, she knew, had ended her career of usefulness and piety, and a nun of Irish descent, by the name of Shannon had replaced her.

"If you will excuse me for a moment," said the amiable religious, rising from her seat, "I shall make you acquainted with our Rev. Mother."

Our friends were struck with the air of stateliness which distinguished this illustrious personage. Her brow, full of thought and purpose, indicated the leading spirit of that community. But, notwithstanding her innate consciousness of superiority, her steel blue eyes sparkled with animation, and a genial smile lighted up her rubicund face. There was in her temperament a childish faculty for mirth, and a spontaneity of humor which rendered her a very entertaining companion. Lucile listened with interest to her wise and salient conversation; the recluse's familiarity with subjects of worldly and political import, astonished her and increased her admiration and respect. Mother Shannon had taken her by the hand and kindly questioned her about her studies and home life; yet, Lucile stood in awe of one in whom were combined authority and such brilliant qualities of the mind; she preferred the gentle and sweet-tempered Mistress-General. Her refined man-

ners, her cordiality and motherly ways had, from the first, won her heart. She longed to throw her impulsive arms around her neck and implore her for the love and interest she once bestowed upon her mother. But she dared not trust to the feelings of her own heart, which threatened at every moment to overcome her. Lucile was greatly surprised when the grave and portly Mother Shannon offered to accompany them on a tour of inspection through the building; this seemed to her a condescension. In a hall of interminable length, they met the portress, who passed them without the faintest sign of recognition. She walked rapidly by, her mournful visage almost hugging the walls. Her black veil fluttered in the breezy passage, like the shroud of a phantom ship, gliding silently in a gale.

One class-room after another revealed its ranks of rosy-cheeked girls who, upon the entrance of the visitors, arose from their seats and displayed their smiling countenances. Then visits were made to the neat and airy dormitories, each of which is dedicated to some particular saint, represented in painting or statuary. Wherever they passed, the floors shone like alabaster, and the most scrupulous order prevailed. The tables in the vast refectory had been set for supper; an array of two hundred silver goblets enumerated the pupils enrolled. This was a familiar scene to Mrs. Hunt; but it was a vexed question to Lucile, by *what* means a repast could be prepared for such a number, and from what source such an abundance could be derived. It did not require much time for her to investigate the matter. Many were her surreptitious visits to the convent kitchen, where she stood before a monster range and watched in wonder, the greatness of its capacities. A dozen lay sisters assisted the *chief cook*—a merry-hearted fellow, who made the place ring with anthems. The slave pos-

sessed a voice of extraordinary compass and melody, and sang with enthusiasm, all the masses and chants he had heard in the convent chapel. Whether at the glowing furnace, or out in the open air preparing fruits and vegetables for dinner, his features shone with cheer, and the joyfulness of his heart found vent in ceaseless song. On hearing his vocal manœuvres one would be tempted to think that a priest and full choir were holding solemn service in the culinary department. Strange to say the sisters never interfered with this peculiar flow of spirits nor protested against it, but moved about in silent occupation, unmindful of the mimic singer.

Lucile would often take a peep into the marble-floored dairy, where an inexhaustible supply of rich milk, cream, cheese and butter, filled the air with lacteal fragrance.

And there was the cool, sweet-scented pantry, with its clean cypress shelves, freighted with well-replenished crocks, jars and glasses. Red-cheeked apples and odorous oranges lay in tempting rows for ready and wholesome desserts. With a knowledge of the resources on hand, Lucile ceased to wonder at the abundance daily provided at the meals. The visitors found but one patient in the infirmary—a pretty and delicate looking child of eight. She sat in a tiny rocking chair, turning with listless grace the leaves of a picture-book. On a gaudily painted waiter near her, was a plate containing a lunch of amber-colored preserves and crackers; from all appearance, the dainty sweet had failed to tempt the invalid's appetite. On the entrance of the strangers, she arose to make her little courtesy; a few stray curls fell caressingly upon her brow; she looked so sweet, so sad and interesting; she seemed so young to be sent away from home, that Mrs. Hunt's maternal sympathies were touched. She could not resist the impulse of going to the child and kissing her. Lucile followed her mother's example.

“What is your name?” asked Mrs. Hunt, carressing the delicate hand which lay passively in one of hers.

“Ada St. Armand,” responded she, in a sweet creole accent.

“Ada is such a pretty name! My little girl here, is called Lucile. I hope you two will become great friends.”

Ada looked up with a frank smile into Lucile’s face, and placing her hand on her arm, asked in an earnest tone: “Will you stay with me, Lucile?”

“She is an orphan,” explained Mother Shannon, on leaving the infirmary. “Both of her parents died of the heart disease. Immediately after her mother’s death she was sent to us by an uncle, who himself packed up her trunk, in which, by the way, were many of her poor mother’s clothes. The child has undoubtedly inherited the fatal malady of her parents. She is in wretched health and must be treated like an exotic.”

The knowledge of Ada’s sad history augmented Mrs. Hunt’s interest and sympathy in her behalf.

On her visit to the beautiful convent chapel, Mrs. Hunt knelt at the altar railing, where oft, in her girlhood, she had said her prayers and watched the glimmer of the sanctuary lamp. She now asked for strength to overcome the loneliness of heart, which she knew awaited her on her return home without that dear companion, who for twelve years had been her joy and solace. From the chapel they descended into the extensive *parterre* and grounds, where shrubs of every variety, and the loveliest of autumnal flowers filled the air with their spicy odors. They came to a corner in a southern exposure of the garden, where one of the sisters was at work among cold frames, sheltered by a group of orange trees, then loaded

with fruit. "Sister Josephine," said the Mother Superior, "give our friends some of your oranges."

The owner of the tropical orchard prided herself on the size, sweetness and excellence of its productions.

"*En v'la de belles,*" she made answer, opening a large basket which lay on the turf beside her. "*Je les avais conservées pour l'infirmierie.*"

Mrs. Hunt protested against accepting what had been destined for the sick. Sister Josephine assured her with much earnestness, that she had only gathered the over-ripe, and that the season was so far advanced, she would be compelled in a few days to despoil the trees of the rest of their treasures. At this moment, the stroke of a great bell floated in the air and announced the vesper hour. The last glow of the evening light was expiring over the arched roofs of the garden sanctuaries. All the unoccupied nuns were to retire to the chapel, where they read, in sad monotones, certain Psalms arranged for vespers. When the last, solemn tones vibrated in the still atmosphere, Mrs. Hunt turned to Lucile. "Good-night, darling," she said in a voice which shook with suppressed emotion.

For the first time in her life, Lucile was to be separated from her mother. She burst into an uncontrollable fit of weeping.

"We shall see you again to-morrow, my pet; we are only going over there to the boarding house," said Mr. Hunt, removing her hands from her face that he might kiss her.

"O, papa! do let me go with you," pleaded she, wiping with desperation the tears, which flowed in streams, from her flushed cheeks.

"No," answered her father with firmness; "it is best that you remain here to-night. It will not be so painful, my love, knowing you will see us again in the morning."

“Foolish child!” said Mother Alchenar,” taking Lucile by the hand. “Come with me; by morning you will be so pleased with us, nothing will persuade you to leave the convent again.”

The assertion brought an incredulous smile to the girl’s lips. However, she permitted herself to be led as far as the chapel entrance. On reaching the top of the marble steps, she turned suddenly in the direction taken by her parents. “O, papa!” she cried, in a despairing tone, “you mean to deceive me; I will not see you again in the morning.” Her pretty summer hat had fallen back upon her shoulders, throwing in relief her sweet, pathetic face.

Mr. Hunt paused and glanced at her—his only child—who from her babyhood had been his constant companion on the lone plantation in the woods of Grosse Tete. The thought smote him keenly; for a moment he wavered in his purpose; then, steeling his heart against emotion, and assuming an air of gayety, he gallantly waved his hand to her, saying, “I give you my word, darling!”

This was sufficient; Lucile bowed in acknowledgment of her father’s promise and re-entered the chapel.

CHAPTER XI.

INITIATION.

MOTHER ALCHENAR conducted Lucile through the long, gloomy corridors to one of those spacious class-rooms, numerically divided into "cones."

"Wait here, for a few minutes, my child," she said, on leaving her charge. "I am sure, you will not feel lost among so many girls."

In fact, Lucile found herself surrounded by an astonishing number of young ladies, all seated at their desks, busily writing their French exercises. The appearance of the "new comer" was a most welcome distraction to most of the girls, for, notwithstanding the vigilance of an aged nun who walked the floor, they augmented her discomfort by whispering to each other and then staring her out of countenance. The poor child, who had never met with such rudeness before, felt herself in a most uncomfortable predicament, and a feeling of loneliness seemed about overpowering her soul when the door opened and there entered the sweetest-faced creature she had ever looked upon. Hers was not the beauty of grace and form only, but of a loveliness of expression which radiated from a pure and sympathetic heart. Even beneath her homely garb, the faultless outlines of her figure were conspicuous, and her movements, though vivacious, were full of charm and grace. The cameo-like beauty of her face was lit up with a smile which seemed to harmonize with her exquisitely chiseled lips and the brightness of her eyes. This fascinating nun walked softly and daintily across the apartment, and seated herself on the bench beside Lucile.

"Would you not like to come and stay with me at the 'Little Pensionnat?' " she asked, taking Lucile by the hand.

"I should like it ever so much," replied the child, promptly, though she had not the remotest idea of the location of that utopian Pensionnat.

"Mother Alchenar tells me that you are twelve years of age; you will be the eldest of my little girls; but I shall expect you to give them good example. May I depend on your good conduct, Lucile?"

The consciousness of her imperfections, struck the sensitive girl with palpable force, and she asked:

"Are your little girls *extraordinarily* good?"

"Well, as good as might be expected of well-bred children."

"Then give me a trial. I shall make no promises, though—because—I think I have been"—here there was a little break down in Lucile's voice—"Papa and Mamma have always allowed me to have my own way."

"Indeed!" ejaculated the pretty nun, arching her penciled eye-brows, "but you do not expect to be that much indulged here? You will have to submit to the convent rules."

"O, I intend to do that!" answered Lucile, with warmth, "only I cannot promise you to be perfect. You may try me."

Lucile passed an exceptional examination and, much to the annoyance of a set of older girls, she was promoted to the senior classes, in both English and French. Her childish appearance belied her age, and the progress she had attained in her studies was a rebuke to her class-mates, and, for a time, was the cause of envious and unfriendly feelings towards her. But the sweet and amiable disposition of their innocent rival, her artless ways and the unconsciousness of her own merits, soon divested them of their foolish pride and all-unworthy sentiments.

Lucile possessed a natural talent for drawing; at home she had a portfolio full of crude but meritorious sketches; most of these were tame and insignificant bits of scenery, which her facile brush had clothed in artistic beauty. One of her drawings represented a log-cabin, with its accessories, the wood-pile, the rail fence and rustic stile. The smoke curling from the mud chimney and dissipating itself among the etched branches of leafless trees, was delineated with art and delicacy worthy of an adept. Another, still more characteristic, was the trunk of a lofty cypress, clasped in the deadly embrace of the poison oak. The white form of a solitary crane, perched upon its apex, contrasted wierdly with a mass of billowy clouds piled as a back-ground.

Lucile did not confine her talent to landscapes alone, she displayed much skill in drawing figures, especially dramatic scenes from ancient history. Though lacking in necessary traits, Zulma posed for her models—even for celebrities like Cleopatra and the Queen of Sheba. On such occasions her young mistress fell upon her own resources to supply deficiencies, so sadly wanting in her patient but unlovely model.

A week after Lucile's arrival, Madam Doremus, the gentle mistress of the little Pensionnat, brought her to the studio that she might begin drawing lessons. A score of large girls occupied seats around a broad table; they seemed pleasantly employed in congenial tasks. Drawing lessons were given at the noon recreation, consequently a rigid discipline was not enforced in this department. Whilst at work, the teacher permitted her pupils to exchange ideas relative to their studies, and even allowed their conversation to drift into harmless convent gossip. Therefore, when Lucile entered the classroom, she was confronted by a battery of beaming countenances and greeted by the following harassing exclamations:

“Why, there’s Lucile!”

“Not to begin drawing lessons, surely?”

“Be off child, you are already too precocious for one of your age.”

“The idea of such a little thing taking drawing lessons!”

(To their teacher)—“Madam, we young ladies protest against such an imposition.”

“Madame Doremus, can’t you provide dolls for the amusement of your babies during recess?”

Poor Lucile was at loss how to take this reception. Were the girls taunting her, or merely jesting? Her changing color betrayed her annoyance, but she controlled her feelings and kept in good humor. She was reassured by the sight of the teacher who stood at the end of the long table sharpening a crayon for one of her scholars. To her joy, she proved to be her own kind teacher of the second English class.

Madame Toury was one of those sterling characters that undesignedly inspire confidence. Her clear, blue eyes, full of cheer and animation, reflected the goodness of her heart; and her magnificent forehead, white and smooth as parian marble, denoted firmness and extraordinary intelligence. She was of a medium size, but carried her head with an air of imperiousness, strangely at variance with her general appearance, or the benevolence of her disposition.

“Oh! is this my little ‘Pussy Cat?’” she exclaimed, laying down her pen-kuife and coming up to Lucile, “you did not tell me you were to learn drawing; have you taken lessons before?”

“No, ma’am, but I have tried to sketch, and have made a great many pictures, already.”

“On your slate,” suggested one of the girls.

“Indeed, no,” replied Lucile, “Papa gave me the best of drawing paper and a box of paints, besides.”

There was a perceptible titter.

“You think yourself *so* smart!” replied one of the girls, leaning back on her chair and fixing her eyes on Lucile. “’Tis a pity you did not bring your *chef d’oeuvre* for exhibition!”

Here Lucile’s powers of endurance threatened to forsake her; she turned aside to hide the tears which suffused her eyes.

Madame Toury cast on the class a glance which none of them failed to interpret, and they silently fell to work. She then prepared a seat for Lucile, and kindly endeavored to distract her mind from unpleasant thoughts.

“What shall I give you for a model?” she said, taking up a large portfolio. “Come and look over these sketches. Here is a cute one—the head of a pussy cat. How cunning! Should you not like to try your hand on this? it is not hard to draw.”

“Anything you choose will suit me,” replied Lucile, taking up the model, “I think this very pretty and easy.”

After Lucile had been installed and had received instructions how to proceed in the work allotted to her, Madame Toury walked across the room to attend to the wants of the rest of her class. The child applied herself with such diligence and expedition, that the masterful strokes of her crayon on the rough paper attracted the attention of her teacher, who, more than once, turned in wondering surprise in the direction whence they proceeded. But she forbore disturbing her interesting pupil, though it cost her an effort to curb her curiosity and impatience to examine the result of progress made under

such headway. At last Lucile heaved a little sigh and laid down her pencil.

“Madame, I have finished,” she said. “Will you come and see whether it is well done, or shall I bring it to you?”

Her teacher walked to the desk; she stood for a moment like one struck dumb with surprise.

“Dear child!” she exclaimed, “you are a born artist! Why, your sketch is as good as the model! you have even improved upon it!”

“May we come and see? do, Madame Toury,” pleaded several voices in a chorus.

The sketch was handed around for inspection. To the teacher’s surprise and pleasure, there was no trace either of envy, or of ill-feeling in the eulogies bestowed by the girls; all expressed their admiration and agreed that Lucile deserved a premium for her cleverness.

“Now, Lucile,” said Madame Toury, “you will not have time to begin work on another sketch, but you may choose a model for your next lesson. Here is a landscape, the picture of an old mill with the water tumbling merrily over the wheel. I am afraid it is too difficult; this one is prettier.”

She placed before Lucile a small landscape—that of a rustic bridge spanning a stream of water. Tall trees on opposite banks, leaned across and overshadowed the bridge; a wild vine clambered to the topmost boughs and returned earthward in graceful and airy tendrils. Lucile scrutinized the drawing in silence; presently her red lips began to quiver and two opalescent tears rolled from her cheeks upon the paper before her. At the sight of her emotion, Madame Toury hastily removed the offending sketch from the desk.

“Now, now, child, you are not compelled to work on this; I should have known it was too hard for such a little pussy as yourself.”

Lucile tried valiantly to overcome her weakness, but the bridge and its rural surroundings, had carried her back to dear, old Grosse Tete and to that sylvan spot, the summer resort of herself and parents, in the happy days of yore. It was here, too, that she and Zulma sought for the ripest May-pops and muscadines, and in spring-time, they tramped through its dewy paths, searching for the wild violets which lurked around in pleasant nooks. At the sound of the bell, she arose and mechanically placed her drawing materials in their receptacle. Neither her teacher or her class-mates ever discovered the cause of her sudden emotion, or the sadness of expression which seemed to have settled on her usually cheerful countenance.

CHAPTER XII.

LETTERS FROM THE CONVENT.

CONVENT SACRED HEART, NOV. 28, 1860.

DEAR PAPA AND MAMMA—Mother Alchenar has given me permission to write a *little* every day at the noon recess, so that I may have a long letter to send you on Fridays.

I am getting over my home-sickness very nicely, I think. The ladies are so kind to me, I shouldn't wonder if I learned to love my new home. I give all my attention to my studies, because I know the sooner I finish my education, the sooner I shall return home for good. I get very lonely at night, and love to stand by the dormatory windows to watch the boats. They are passing at all hours of the night—such magnificent things, Mamma, with the red light of the cinders trailing behind them. When they make a landing at the Convent, I make myself believe that *you*, Papa, are coming to see me. I wrote you a short letter last week; I hadn't the heart to write more. Dear Grosse Tete seems so much out of the way of boats, I'm afraid my letter will take a great, great while to reach you. Mamma, do you remember what a time you had trying to get me to write letters for exercises? I thought it mean of you to force me to write to people who had died long ago. I did not mind writing to that good Mr. Addison, who helped to make the Spectator so interesting; or to Mr. Davies, to tell him how hard I found his arithmetic; but I did hate to write to Mrs. Trollope, who made fun of us Americans. I see now, you were only preparing me for this separation, and I am thankful to you for all the pains you took to teach me.

In my first letter, I wrote that I was staying at the little Pensionnat, this is the home of the youngest girls at the Sacred Heart. We live in the rear of the long music house back of the Chapel. We are forty little girls in all, and one grown girl—a “Child of Mary”—who helps Madame Doremus keep us straight. We have a better time than the large Pensionnat. In cold weather we are allowed to stay in bed until breakfast time. Little Ada Saint Armand has left the infirmary. We love each other dearly. Madam Doremus told us that her life was in constant danger from heart disease. She is not allowed to run about and romp, like the rest of us girls.

Dearest ones, I am trying to be good, so as to get a ribbon at the next distribution of prizes. I do not find the Convent rules so hard to observe, except *silence*. When I first came, I was in the habit of speaking out loud at any time, just as we do at home. This used to set the girls to giggling. Once, I spoke out in the refectory. Madam Miller, who stays with us at meal times, turned upon me with a look of astonishment and rolled her eyes at me in a manner which frightened me very much. The convent fare is so nice; it is a wonder to me how the Sisters continue to furnish us with so many good things. We have dessert every day, always of two kinds, fruit and pie or cake.

On Fridays they give us pudding, which reminds me so much of Aunt Polly's “pig,” only this is filled with dried prunes instead of peaches and apples like we have at home.

Yesterday was promenade day, and we had a delightful walk to the woods. Before starting, they gave each of us a large piece of ginger-cake and a handful of pecans. These we ate on the way. The way to the woods is through an avenue of magnificent oaks and Lombardy poplars. It seemed over a

mile long, and it is as grand as it can be. The girls told me that they are sometimes allowed to take a ramble through the woods, but last evening we were not permitted to pass the big gate because we got there too late. But I put my head through the bars and sniffed the sweet odors of the dim, solemn wood. The familiar scene filled my heart with longings for home, and it seemed to me that I was nearer you at that moment than I had ever been since I came. While I was gazing at the grand old trees and grape-vines, I heard a kildee singing; the sound of its voice rang through the woods, and it sang as sweetly and as mournfully as the kildees of Grosse Tete. This was too much for my poor heart to bear, and I laid my head on the bars and cried most disgracefully.

I am improving very fast in music. My teacher says it is a pity I had not begun at an earlier age. But I do not regret the years I spent with *you*, instead of being here, only to learn music. The guitar is not as difficult to learn as the piano, and I have plenty time before me.

I have been writing this letter, during recess, for nearly a week. You will find it long, my sweet ones; you will have the patience, I hope, to read it through. Poor Zulma will enjoy hearing you read it.

Give my love to all my friends, and tell the servants I often think of them with kindness and love. Remember me to Uncle Dave and all the darkies.

I wrote to *grandpère* last week.

Let me know whether you fancy this sort of a journal. How I envy its lot! It shall fall into your hands, dear mamma, and come in contact with your sweet breath. I cover this page with kisses for you and papa.

With much love, I remain your *own* affectionate,

LUCILE.

LETTER II.

CHRISTMAS WEEK, Dec. 29, 1860.

Thank you, thank you, darling papa and mamma, for the box you sent me! Madame Doremus says you have sent me enough things to last six months. I cut the cake at dinner on Christmas day, and distributed it among the little girls. Our table looked like a wedding feast. I have never been to one, but just imagined it did. Kiss *grandpère* for the oranges; they are the more appreciated because they were raised on the old plantation.

Tell *grandmère* that I have not yet opened the jar of preserves, but it is an object of attraction; they look so tempting through the glass; they are so transparent, we can see through and through the peaches.

Sister Josephine and I are great friends. It was she who opened my box. I offered her some of the nice things, but she shook her head, and told me to "send them to the infirmary instead." Her mind is bent on providing dainties for the sick girls. She hung the bunch of bananas in the kitchen pantry to ripen. You ought to see the refectory pantry! It is so crowded with boxes and hampers, there is no standing room left. Each boat that lands puts off a lot of boxes; with few exceptions, all the girls have received one for Christmas. I make it a duty to divide the contents of my box with those less fortunate than myself. Whenever I offer them things, I try to make them believe that they do me a favor by accepting; it is humiliation enough for them to know that they have been neglected.

Poor little Ada was not remembered by any of her friends. I filled a cornucopia with my finest and prettiest French candies and presented it to her. She was so delighted with the gift, that she began dancing all over the room; but the excite-

ment soon broke her down; she stopped very suddenly and pressed one of her hands over her little heart, saying: "It is jumping hard, Lucile." Her sweet lips had turned quite blue, and I was awfully afraid she was going to have one of her spells of heart disease.

I thought the religious ceremonies during Christmas week so grand and touching. I became very pious, that is, I loved to go to the chapel to say my prayers. The altars are all magnificently decorated; at the foot of that of the Blessed Virgin is a waxen figure of the Infant Jesus lying in a manger. It stretches out its little hands as though begging to be taken out of its cold bed of straw. It looks so sweet and natural, it is hard for me to keep from doing it.

Every evening since Christmas we have had some sort of entertainment. On Christmas night we had tableaux. I wish you had seen how lovely they were. The costumes were so strange and magnificent, it was hard to recognize the girls who took part in them; it was like seeing people in a dream. When they represented the different scenes in "The Feast of Balthasar" I was struck dumb with admiration. I cannot tell you how grand and beautiful was that of the "Nativity."

Then they showed us the "magic lantern." The Little Pensionnat and all the large girls were assembled in the first "cones." Mother Shannon and many of the ladies were present. At one end of the room was the apparatus; it reminded me of cannons I had seen in pictures. Mother Murphy was standing behind it, and I imagined she was going to shoot at us; this made me feel very uncomfortable. But, after a while, they brought in a large screen which they placed before the lantern, then, a brilliant light fell upon the white screen, followed by a beautiful picture of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. It was a pleasant surprise to me, for I had no idea of

the effects produced by the magnifying glasses. Some of the representations were funny and made us laugh; others were very pretty, especially those of the active volcanoes and "ships on fire." They showed us many historical pictures, about which Mother Shannon questioned us; I could have answered every time, but was too timid to do so.

On other nights, we had plays and charades which were also very amusing. The one called "Behind Time," was so funny, that we laughed during the whole performance. It was written by one of the nuns who is the glummiest looking creature you ever saw. It is a wonder to me how she managed to think of so many laughable things. She never laughs herself, and I reckon, never did, even when she was composing the piece.

We had most fun on Santa Claus' night. We were once more seated in one of the large class-rooms in the middle of which were half a dozen long poles laying across the backs of chairs. Hundreds of stockings, tied in pairs and bulging out from top to toe, hung across these poles. When all was ready, one of the ladies began calling out the numbers; each girl went for her own stocking, but was forbidden to open it before permission was given. After the last number was called out, a signal was given for us to open and inspect the contents of the stockings. You should have heard the shouts and laughter which followed. The stockings were filled with all sorts of things, fruit, candies, ashes, stones, hard boiled eggs, potatoes, dolls and pencils. Each article was wrapped up in a separate piece of paper. You may know with what impatience we tore open the parcels. Some of the girls had less than others, this was the cause of much dissatisfaction. I had nothing to complain of; besides a small volume of Lamartine's poems, I found a beautifully dressed doll. Ada, too, had a doll and many other pretty things, which she offered to divide with

those who had not been so well served. The child has strange notions; it so happened that both of her neighbors found a corn cob in their stockings; this attracted her attention. After opening all her parcels she looked around with an air of disappointment and said:

“But—Santa Claus forgot to give me a cob!”

All the girls laughed and began throwing corn cobs in her lap, until she cried out:

“Don’t—I want just one.”

Everybody here loves her and allows her to have her own way.

Our holidays are nearly ended, and I shall never forget my first Christmas at the Sacred Heart. Everything was so new; the impressions made are deep and will never be effaced from my memory. I have seen so much since I left home, that my whole life seems like a year, compared with these last weeks. I am learning to love my new home and the kind ladies. It is much better that I should, since it is necessary for me to stay here until I finish my education; otherwise, I would be too miserable to learn much. But do not imagine I am forgetting you my darling ones. I have you in my mind, *constantly*; only, the thought of you does not cause me as much unhappiness, as when I first came.

I think of you with the fond hope, that in a few years, I shall return to you, *never more* to leave you.

Your affectionate daughter,

LUCILE.

LETTER III—SAD TIDINGS.

Jan. 3, 1861.

O mamma, little Ada is dead! This will be sad news to you; goodness knows it is hard enough for me to write about. Although we all knew she had heart disease, and was, at any time, in danger of death, we lived in hopes that she would have been spared us many years to come. The suddenness of her death was a great shock to me, almost as much so as was poor little Katie Dawsey's ending. This is the second time I have lost the ones I loved.

We had passed such a pleasant Christmas week. Every evening the ladies got up some kind of entertainment for our benefit. Poor little Ada seemed to enjoy them more than any one else. She went wild over the tableaux, and would stand up on the benches and clap her hands, each time the bell rang for the curtain to rise. She seemed to be making the most of the life so nearly ended. On the morning of the 31st she had an attack of the palpitation during recess. Madame Doremus had her taken to the infirmary. As soon as she felt better, she begged to be allowed to return to the little Pensionnat, but the doctor would not hear of it. There were half a dozen patients beside Ada, in the infirmary. As it was New Year's eve, and they were only sick from cold, Sister Bondreau gave them permission to play games during the night recreation. They amused themselves playing one called "mad-dog," which is very noisy and exciting. Ada was forbidden to join them, but she sat up in bed and watched them chasing each other around the room. Whenever they came near her bed, she would scream and jump next to the wall. This made her so nervous, that she was taken with another attack of the palpitation. It was some time before her companions noticed her condition; as soon as they did, they ran out to inform the

sister-infirmarian, who immediately sent for Madame Doremus. We were all at play and were having a gay time, when one of the sisters came in and beckoned to her. Madame Doremus left us in charge of Celeste, as she always does on leaving. We thought nothing of her absence, and continued our chatting and romping. In a short while, Madame Doremus returned, when she opened the door, I looked around, as a person will naturally do on anyone's entrance. But, O mamma! I saw something in her looks which made my heart stop beating. She stood in the half open door and the light fell directly in her face; it was as white as a sheet! I think I was the first to notice this, or to suspect that something dreadful had happened. I stood up and waved my hand to silence the children; it took them some time to understand what I wanted. By degrees, they stopped talking and turned in the direction where Madame Doremus was standing with her hand still resting upon the door-knob. When she spoke, her voice was so unnatural that I would not have recognized it.

"Children," she said, "I have come to announce to you that one of your companions—has just left you—and is now an angel in Paradise."

When she said this, I cried out: "Is it Ada!"

"Yes," answered Madame Doremus; "the dear child has done with life's sufferings; her little heart is, at length, at rest, and her pure spirit has found its true home."

The children stared at each other as though they had not understood the meaning of her words. One of the little girls looked up in my face and asked: "What is the matter with Ada, Lucile?" I burst into tears. We all cried for Ada, for she was the most loveable child I had ever known. After a while, Madame Doremus returned to her desk and called us around her. The first thing we noticed was little Ada's chair,

in which she used to sit and peep at us from behind her book. Those dear, laughing eyes, we shall never see again! After we were all seated, Madame Doremus began telling us about Ada. She was still alive and conscious of her teacher's presence, for she begged with gasping breath to be carried to her own little bed. She expired repeating after Madame Doremus these dying words: "Little Jesus, receive my soul."

We sat there for a long time crying and listening to the beautiful things Madame Doremus told us about heaven, and the love of Jesus for little children. Her words consoled us for the loss of Ada; for, after all, God knew what was best for her. She was a lovely orphan, and He removed her from earth while her soul was without blemish.

Ours was a sad New Year's day! The world outside was cold and dreary, and within it was still more gloomy. The next morning after Ada's death, I was permitted to accompany some of the older girls who went to look upon her for the last time. They had laid her out on one of the little cots in one of the rooms adjoining the infirmary. She was beautifully dressed, and a wreath of white roses lay on her dark curls. There was a sweet smile on her lips; she looked as though she was only sleeping and having a pleasant dream. I thought her even prettier than when alive, and more childish in appearance. Sister B— told us, it is supposed that the soul, on leaving the body, assumes its likeness; only, it is divested of all traces of age and human infirmities, and is clothed with eternal youth. This is a very sweet and consoling belief, mamma; if it be true, we shall recognize each other in heaven. They had crossed little Ada's hands very naturally over the heart which had been the cause of so much annoyance and suffering to her. I had often seen them in that position, but never so *peacefully* and permanently at rest. Ada's body was

to be placed in the large tomb in the convent cemetery. None of the girls were allowed to attend the burial, as the weather was very cold, and they started in a drizzling rain. The funeral took place late in the evening. It was awfully sad to see them passing with poor little Ada. The priest and the nuns formed a dreary procession which filled my heart with grief and fear. I thought of the precious child being laid into that lonely tomb and left there alone—she who was so full of life and so fond of sunshine! O mamma! it is terrible to die away from home!

Come and see me, my dear papa; I am so lonely.

Your loving,

L.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOME AGAIN.

ON a glorious afternoon, near the close of August, a handsome family carriage rumbled merrily along the cool, shady banks of Grosse Tete. Lucile Hunt, on her way home, watched with beaming eyes, every feature of the familiar scene.

The emerald waters of the bayou, flashing from behind the dark green foliage of trees, seemed to her far more interesting than even the great Mississippi, sweeping pompously down to meet the ocean. The air was heavy with the fragrance of maturing vegetation. The twitter of birds, mingled with the harsh caw-caw of exultant crows, winging their flight across the corn-fields; and somewhere beneath the azure sky, the plaintive call of the partridge, fell to earth in undulating strains.

At a certain turn of the route, the spirited greys, with tossing heads and quickened speed plunged beneath the ancient oaks and locusts lining the roadside on the Hunt plantation. Lucile now beheld at a distance a well known figure speeding with outstretched arms to welcome her.

“Hole on dere, Unc’ Dave!” cried the breathless Zulma. “Stop dat carriage tell I hitch on.”

But the surly Jehu shook the reins and snapped his whip in her face.

“You knowed de way clean tur yere, did you? Well, you kin trot back,” was his ungallant reply.

“Check your horses, Dave,” interposed his master, “and give her time to climb on behind.”

"How you come on, little mistis?" exclaimed Zulma, introducing herself through the opening and bending over to scrutinize the lovely face within.

"I am well, thank you, Zulma, and *so* glad to see you again."

"T'ank de Lawd, you come back! I was on t'orns and cockle-burrs 'bout you ever sense day befo' yisterday."

"Indeed!" cried Lucile, pressing warmly the slave's coarse, black fingers; "and what made you feel so uncomfortable about me, I wonder?"

"Didn't I go an' dream de Quitman blowded up wid you an' yo' pa?"

"Oh my!" exclaimed Lucile laughing merrily; "you see for yourself how groundless were your fears. Oh dear!" continued she, her eyes sparkling with animation, "there's the old bridge and the Wisteria vines still clinging to the cotton-woods."

"An' deres de Injins!" added Zulma. "I spect dey bin dancin' juba, little mistis."

"How's that?"

"Nobody been prayin' 'm out ov pergitory, sense you lef."

"Why Zulma," replied Lucile with seeming concern, "you should have prayed for them while I was away!"

"Who, me? I let 'm frizzle, yes."

The distance from this picturesque bridge to the next, was a little over a quarter of a mile; it spanned "Back Creek," a bayou which ran into Grosse Tete at the high point upon which the new residence had been erected. The prospect between the two bridges was entirely intercepted by the trees which lined the roadside. The public road, cut within the bed of this bayou, formed a considerable slope towards the bridge, and a perpendicular embankment flanked it all the way up the declivity. Hence, the ascent of the carriage was gradual.

Lucile, in her anxiety to catch a glimpse of her mother, had directed her undivided attention towards the old home which came in view just as the horses reached the level road. But alas! time had despoiled it of its homely charms, and hung about it an air of forlornness which struck her senses with dismay. The old cabin, shrunken in size, seemed to have retreated in conscious humility behind the trees and shrubbery which now rioted in front of it. Lucile was disturbed by painful and conflicting emotions. Was it possible that her heart had grown callous, or that the elegance of her late residence and its refining atmosphere, had created a distaste for this humble domicile, or diminished her former attachment to a spot teeming with memories of her happy childhood? Her better nature instantly revolted against the bare idea, and her throbbing heart was overwhelmed by feelings of tenderness and remorse.

"You's on de wrong trac', little mistis," exclaimed Zulma, who had been observing with keen relish the natural mistake made by Lucile. Look over yonder!"

The girl was totally unprepared for the sight which met her eyes as she turned in the direction indicated. Several times, during her absence from home, she had asked concerning the progress of the new house, but her parents had ignored her questions, and she took it for granted that for some good cause, the work upon it had been suspended. Her surprise and pleasure were therefore unbounded, when she beheld the elegantly finished mansion standing in the place of the nondescript building she had left only eight months before. The carriage turned from the public road into a wide avenue of young chinatrees. The handsome edifice, with its graceful white columns, now peered from between the trees like an airy palace created by the wand of enchantment. So thought

Lucile as she gazed upon it with unfeigned admiration and surprise; she seemed bewildered and unable to realize that this magnificent home was destined to replace their former puny habitation. These pleasant thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the appearance of her mother, who, with a number of her friends, hastened to welcome her. Was ever human heart overpowered by emotions as sweetly blended as that of Lucile, as she viewed through her tears, such love and beauty!

"How could you have finished it so exquisitely?" she questioned; "how could you coax the plants to grow so tall and luxuriantly, during so short a time?"

"Love and a desire to surprise you, my darling, emulated our ambition and inspired the flowers to grow;" replied her father, gazing tenderly into her sweet, expressive countenance.

"It will take me a lifetime to repay you," she whispered, passing her hand caressingly through his arm.

As the happy party sauntered up the gravel walk, Lucile broke into increasing exclamations of delight at every fresh object falling unexpectedly beneath her notice.

"You brought the ferns from the woods. I know, mamma;" she exclaimed, fingering the graceful fronds. "I wonder how they like it here, among these fine flowers. I declare, here are real century plants like the ones in the convent pasture; and these are hydrangeas, tiger lilies and dahlias. You see mamma, I've been studying botany. What elegant steps!" she continued, running up the newly painted flight. "Oh the magnificent hall and pretty furniture! why this is perfectly beautiful, papa, and is a paradise." She turned to her mother, her cheeks glowing with excitement; "we shall be as happy here, mamma, as we were in our old cabin over there." But the sentiment sounded like treason to the sensitive and impulsive girl. She threw herself in her mother's arms, exclaiming: "That would

be impossible, we can never forget the happy time we had there, never, never!"

"And you are ready to cry over the crazy old cabin, instead of thanking your stars that you're out of it;" replied Nannie Dawsey, unclasping her arms and leading her across the hall into a cozy bedroom which the girl announced to her was her "very own."

As they entered, a soft breeze, freighted with the odor of the Chinese jasmine crept beneath the rustling curtains and wafted her a silent welcome. Besides a dainty set of cottage bedroom furniture, there were rockers, easy-chairs and a luxurious lounge; there were books, pictures and flowers.

Once again Lucile was seized with rapturous delight, and under necessity of throwing herself into her mother's arms to smother her with kisses.

There was so much to say, to see and admire, it took Lucile an hour to divest herself of her dusty garments and don the pretty lawn her mother had prepared for her.

After every apartment had been visited, Mrs. Hunt invited Lucile's guests into the spacious dining-room, where an elaborate lunch was served, and where they lingered until the time had come to say "*au revoir*."

The sweet recollection of this happy evening clung to Lucile as the fragrance of a rose clings to the leaves of a book in which it has been pressed.

"I am going to Livonia to attend a meeting of Vestry-men," said Mr. Hunt, one evening to his wife; "if you and Lucile feel disposed to make a call, I shall order the carriage instead of the buggy."

"That will be nice!" exclaimed Lucile, inserting a book-mark between the leaves of one of Longfellow's poems. "Hia-

watha can well afford to tarry with Minnehaha on 'their pleasant journey homeward,' until our return. Shall we go mamma?"

"Yes, since you have already settled the question," answered her mother smiling.

"Where do you intend stopping, mamma?"

"At the Gresham's, I think."

"O, I am so glad, it is a delightful place to visit. I must wear my best, mustn't I?" asked Lucile rising and looking inquiringly at her mother. They are such stylish people."

"You have nothing finer than your white swiss; you may give a finishing touch by tucking a rose in your belt." And a lovely picture she made a half an hour later, as she walked to the gate where the carriage stood waiting. The sott folds of her snowy gown, undisguised by either puff or flounce, fell gracefully to the top of her tiny boots. Her cheeks, shaded by a wide-brimmed leghorn, rivaled in delicacy of coloring the velvety cabbage-rose, she repeatedly raised to her lips.

"Dese yere hawses gittin' so stuck up," remarked Dave, pulling and twitching at the reins; "'fore long, dey won't want ter titch de ground."

"No wonder Uncle, they are such beauties," exclaimed Lucile, walking around them and gazing with eyes full of admiration. "I like to see them paw the earth like that, and put on their airs!"

"Sense yo' paw went an' bought 'em dese yere shinn' harnesses, dey swell up fit to buss!" continued he, eyeing his team with feigned vindicativeness.

"Do they indeed!" ejaculated Lucile, with a half incredulous air. "You give them too much oats and corn, Uncle."

The negro burst into a hearty fit of laughter; "go 'long chile, its de debbil in 'em, yes; dey ready dis minute to break into a reg'ler stampede, jes' outter debbilment."

"I shouldn't care if they did, under papa's management; they would have to tow the mark, eh Uncle Dave?"

The old darkie groaned in response; his young mistress had inadvertently pricked at some tender spot in the regions of his heart.

After the family had been seated, Mr. Hunt collected the reins and signified his desire to drive. Conscious of the masterly hand which was to guide and control them, the high stepping pair arched their glossy necks and nodded with suppressed eagerness. At the word of command, they started with a bound, and skimmed along with a fleetness and uniformity of motion which elicited the admiration of all who beheld them.

Away, and away, they sped; past corn-fields, where the harvesters bobbing in and out of the golden ripple, resembled a flock of crows pilfering the planters' grain. Past log-houses enclosed by primitive fences, upon which a crowd of little darkies perched, bare-legged and hatless, enjoying, like Salamanders, the streaming sunlight. Past neat cottages and dwellings where thrift and taste were manifested. The air around was redolent with the fragrance of flowers and new mown hay. In every cotton-field, the slaves, like a band of children in a garden of roses, plucked with flying fingers the flaky staple. Dave surveyed in silence, the snowy fields and busy laborers; he was in a ruminating mood and gave vent to his reflections in the following observation:

"You kin sho' tell we'n day's a hard marstar on a place we'n you see niggars goin' on at dat dead rate nebber noticin'

nuffin' 'roun' em, you know day got dare two 'unded poun' ter pick or day 'unded lashes to git."

"I am glad that's not the rule on our place," remarked Lucile.

"We doz de bes' we know how," continued Dave; "an' yo' paw see fur hissef he's takin' de shine offer dem's dat's runnin' day niggars tur death squizzin' work out ter em."

At Livonia, Mr. Hunt resigned the reins. "You will find them easy to manage now," he said to the driver. "Let them trot comfortably the rest of the way."

"Brier Rose" plantation extended nearly a mile along the banks of Grosse Tete. It was a lovely place; in every corner of the picturesque rail-fence, a rosebush clambered and surged over, strewing the grassy roadside with their creamy petals. A grand and elegant mansion, with deep galleries and long, white colonnade, glittered like a modern chateau, at the extremity of a magnificent grove. The immense yard and *parterre* which surrounded the building, presented an assemblage of trees, mingling in harmonious outlines, their rich and varied foliage. There were hospitable cedars, the nursery of the mocking birds; and live-oaks, with the parasitic moss drooping in grey festoons from their ancient boughs. Magnificent weeping-willows trailed their emerald skirts upon the sward. Great Lombardy poplars, as if in disdain, gathered their limbs about them and proudly towered above the rest. In and out, between the patches of shade and sunshine, were flower-beds, rustic seats and summer houses. A bevy of pretty children ran with their hoops and shuttle-cocks, to meet the visitors in the central alley and offered, with winsome grace, their rosy lips to be kissed.

Corine Gresham, a girl with intellectual countenance and a perfect specimen of blonde beauty, greeted Lucile and her mother with cordiality and that self-possession which belong to children of distinguished Southern families.

Mrs. Gresham herself was a beautiful woman, full of wit and vivacity; a charming hostess and a great favorite in society. The contrast between the two women was evident; but the dash and brilliancy which suited so well the style of the woman of the world, only served to accentuate the refined and unobtrusive beauty of the gentle Creole. Nor did the incompatibility of their disposition interfere with their friendly intercourse; the two drifted into pleasant converse, touching upon a variety of subjects, social and domestic, then upon the literature of the day, and lastly, the momentous war question. Here they stood upon common grounds and discussed it with all the warmth and enthusiasm of Southern patriots. In the meantime, Corine had invited Lucile for a ramble over the premises. As they stepped into the pasture, a superb peacock flew from a neighboring shrub to a marble statue of Flora, upon whose head it perched and flaunted its starry train as if inviting the admiration of the two girls.

"How many peafowls have you now?" asked Lucile gazing upon it with childish delight and interest.

"Only three; you see, I can hardly indulge in the luxury of serving up to my friends a dish of peacocks' tongues."

"But you might do the next thing to that, Corine, bake them a pie made of the tongues of *mocking birds*; the place is alive with them."

"Oh you cannibal!" laughed Corine, "would you really partake of such a feast."

"I think I would enjoy their warblings better," answered Lucile, somewhat confused.

"And we are to be treated to a musicale without the asking," answered Corine, peeping into the branches of a laburnum whence proceeded the preluding notes of a mocker. "Listen! 'Tis a wonder to me, how their little heads can hold such a *repertoire*. The airy singer began, first, by mimicking the garrulous tree martin, then, the twitter of a gossiping swallow. Suddenly, its little throat collapsed, bringing forth the low, faint cry of a distressed chick. So pitiful and natural is the imitation, it is said, it often arouses the maternal alarm of the mother hen, especially when it is followed by the equally perfect and threatening cry of the hawk. Next, it burst into the triumphant song of a lark, cleaving its way through a summer sky. It finished off with a gush of glee; then, a warble, dwindling down into a rippling murmur, learned from a woodland orchestra. Gently, softly, the quivering notes expired—mournful as the last chords Love sweeps across the strings of a broken heart.

"My!" exclaimed Lucile, "wasn't that beautiful?"

"That must have been a Jennie Lind among the birds," replied Corine. "We Louisianans ought to be proud of the tribe—by the way, how are you getting along with your music?"

"Finely; I know all my scales and can play the '*Maiden's Prayer*,'" answered Lucile laughing; "that's one of our standards at the convent."

"It is? And which is next in order in your musical progress?" asked the girl passing her arms around her friend's waist, and leading her among the blooming geraniums and heliotropes.

"The '*Monastery Bells*,' I think."

"Has your father bought you a piano yet?"

"No, for there was no occasion for it; on my last birthday, my grandfather made me a present of a fine *Knabe*."

"How old are you, Lucile? Please don't think me over-curious."

"I was thirteen last June."

"You seem wise beyond your years; I wonder why?"

"I do not think I am, Corine, though I imagine I am not as childish in my ways as I ought to be; that's because I have been so much with grown people. But I am not as wise as you are, I am sure;" smiled Lucile looking up archly into the lovely countenance before her.

"But I am in my fifteenth year; I am almost grown, you see. *You* will not have a sweetheart to send to the war will you?"

"O goodness, no! I am nothing but a child, and never think of such things."

"But you are so sweet and pretty, Lucile; the boys cannot help falling in love with you."

The roses fluttered prettily on the cheeks of the coy, artless girl. "Let us talk about the war;" she answered in desperation. "Is your father a Union man or a Secessionist?"

"A Secessionist, by all means; you don't expect him to side with the Yankees, I hope? Why, isn't *your* father a Secessionist?" she asked with an air of astonishment.

"My father's sympathies are with the Southern people, but he—is a—Union man."

"My gracious! you *astound* me! what can be his reasons for advocating such unpatriotic sentiments?"

"Papa's are not 'unpatriotic sentiments,' Corine; from the first, he opposed Secession and the war. He had good and just reasons for doing so."

"I am surprised," answered Corine, with a toss of her beautiful blonde head, "that a man of Mr. Hunt's sense and education should labor under such false impressions."

"I have faith in my father's judgment," answered Lucile, with heightened color; "he understood why it was best for the South to keep from breaking the Union, and from fighting against the old flag."

"Indeed! and I can't see how a Southern man could entertain respect for the striped old thing which has been for so many years the symbol of his oppression. Have we not in exchange, that Bonnie Blue Flag, for which we are all willing to lay down our lives? But Lucile, I cannot believe that you and your mother think and feel as your father does."

"Mamma and I are great Rebels."

"Thank God the heart of every Southern woman beats for Dixie!" cried Corine with warmth. "Here comes Grace with a glass of lemonade, let us drink to the success of our Cause, Lucile."

Corine tilted the glass over her shapely nose. "I have drained the bumper to the triumph of our Confederacy. I believe we are in the right, and that we will gain our Cause." "Suppose we *are* defeated" she resumed, after waiting until the servant girl was out of hearing; "do you know what will be the consequences, Lucile?"

"I am afraid," replied Lucile reflectingly, "we will find ourselves in an awful condition. This I judge from what I know of history. Nations who lose their Cause, find very little mercy in their conquerors."

"If we are beaten, the Yankees are going to set our slaves free—a greater misfortune could not befall us;" sighed Corine, spreading on her knees, her shell-tinted fingers.

"The poor negroes, I am sure, wouldn't *thank* the Yankees for taking them away from their masters and comfortable quarters!" exclaimed Lucile, in a voice full of indignation and contempt.

“There, you are mistaken, my dear; it is said that if the negroes had so much as an *inkling* of what Lincoln intends doing for them, they would all rise against their masters and help the Yankees exterminate them.”

“Why, Corine, they would do no such thing! they think *too much* of their masters to do them such dreadful harm.”

“Then, you little know the true state of things in your own country. I have often heard papa and his friends talk of secret plans for general insurrection among the slaves, and how they have been discovered in time to save us from fearful massacres!”

“Please don’t tell me about them,” cried Lucile with a look of horror. “It is too dreadful to think of, and I cannot believe that the negroes would do it.”

“Well, I hardly believe yours or ours would attempt to cut our throats, because we are kind to our slaves. But they wouldn’t hesitate to do it on plantations where they are cruelly treated.”

“And I wouldn’t blame them for doing it,” said Lucile, rising from her seat. “Let’s not talk about this any more. It makes me feel bad.”

Corine laughed merrily. “I am not as susceptible as you; I have so often heard the subject discussed. But come, I shall sing you a war song to chase away all unpleasant impressions.”

The girls found their mothers in the *parterre* gathering a bouquet of asters and carnations. They were chatting quite merrily.

“Mamma is having a better time than I,” thought Lucile, as she contemplated the smiling countenances of the elder friends.

CHAPTER XIV.

ECHOES FROM THE WAR.

THE opening of the year '62 was one sadly unpropitious to the young Confederacy; its ensuing months brought forth a number of unforeseen calamities. The abandonment of Columbus and New Madrid, the capture of Fort Donelson and Island Number Ten, were among the disasters preceding the fall of New Orleans. They threatened to annihilate the hopes engendered on the plains of Manassas, and to destroy the prestige which had hitherto sustained the Southern armies in the unequal conflict in defense of their firesides and political rights. But the South was not to be daunted, even by such overwhelming reverses; her wise and intelligent leaders and staunch defenders stood their ground, until fortune once again turned towards them her smiling countenance.

When the tocsin of war first sounded, summoning all loyal Southerners to the muster roll, a number of Pointe Coupee's patriots, too impatient to wait for home companies, left the parish to join organized regiments marching to the front. They were eager to meet the enemy at the threshold, and to share the brunt of the battle with those who, in a few months, were to secure political freedom for the South. Girding on their swords, they went forward, marching under the folds of the new-born banner, to the rescue of Tennessee and Kentucky.

The people's confidence and assumption lasted until subsequent events warned them of the gravity of the responsibilities they had shouldered. They were rudely awakened from their dream of "sixty-day campaign." The elated armies that marched on to Richmond to compel the Government to redress

their wrongs, and force a recognition of the sovereignty of the Confederate States, had met with a rebuff which gave a severe shock to their enthusiasm, and convinced them of the magnitude of their undertaking. That brief and brilliant campaign they had foreseen in the strength of their heroic faith, had developed into a stubborn war, in which success was to be wrested *only* from desperate ventures and unflagging perseverance. The South had no foreign resources to fall upon, from which to recruit her armies. When the enemy's withering guns thinned out the serried ranks, no plundering hirelings were pressed forward to fill them. In answer to the country's call, men of illustrious birth and of the best bone and sinew, promptly closed the broken columns of her armies.

Lucile had left the convent a few weeks previous to the capture of New Orleans. On her return home, she was greatly surprised at the condition of affairs, and the wonderful development of events during the time of her absence. Whilst at the convent, rumors from the seat of war had reached her at long intervals and in faint echoes. She knew that at Sumter had occurred the denouement of that long-pending sectional issue which precipitated the country into a bloody conflict. The announcement of one great victory, at Bull Run, rejoiced her heart, and the knowledge that the Confederate troops were marching on to Washington, was one which kept her in a comfortable frame of mind, until she heard that Faragut had threatened the batteries below New Orleans. She found the people at home wholly absorbed in the subject which had become of such vital importance to the country. A new company was being organized, and preparations for defraying the expenses of its equipment were undertaken by the ladies of Grosse Tete.

Mrs. Gresham, one of the most patriotic and influential personages of that vicinity, had generously assumed responsibilities, by placing herself at the head of the enterprise. She called upon Mrs. Hunt one evening to solicit her aid. To her chagrin, the amiable mistress of "Highland" was absent on a visit to her venerable parents of False River. But she was pleasantly entertained by the sweet and intelligent Lucile, to whom she explained her mission, and the plan she had so judiciously prepared. She found in her young friend an enthusiastic ally.

"Now, Lucile," said the lady, after the subject had been thoroughly discussed, "get your guitar and let me hear some of your best songs, that I may be able to decide what part of this programme I shall assign to you."

Lucile arose with cheerful alacrity and brought her instrument out on the gallery, where they had just taken their seats. A soft breeze, laden with the odor of summer flowers, fanned their cheeks and dallied with the tendrils of a clematis vine running over the balustrade. In the parterre below, a pair of humming birds glanced like miniature rainbows among the lilies and petunias.

"Do you like Scotch songs?" asked Lucile, passing her delicate fingers across the strings of her guitar, and casting a timid glance at the aristocratic personage sitting in judgment over her.

"I admire them above all others; sing 'Mary of Argyle,' 'tis my favorite."

Never was prelude sweeter or more pathetic, than that elicited by the light, magnetic touch of the unconsciously gifted performer. Sweeter words were never sung by a more melodious voice.

"I have heard the mavis singing
Her love song to the morn;
I have seen the dewdrop clinging
To the rose just newly born."

Mrs. Gresham sat motionless, listening with rapt attention.

"Dear child! it is a treat to hear you sing!" she exclaimed, as soon as Lucile had struck the last chord of the beautiful aria. "You sing like the mavis mentioned in the song, or as if your soul had been tuned to the sentiments therein expressed."

"Do I? It is because I love music so dearly, Mrs. Gresham; it inspires me."

"You sing so charmingly, *ma chère*, I shall call upon you to sing the solo in the 'Bonnie Blue Flag,' at the presentation of our banner."

Lucile passed her hands nervously across the strings of the guitar, and she dropped her graceful head very low, to hide the rushing tide she felt mounting to her cheeks.

"There is nothing I would not do for our dear Confederacy," she said. "Put me to any test but this, Mrs. Gresham; I could never sing, alone, before a public audience; I shall break down and spoil the whole performance."

The lady bit her lips with ill-repressed vexation. "I know half a dozen girls aspiring to the roll I have offered you, Lucile."

"Then, why not give it to one of those?" asked she, with unwonted eagerness.

"Because none of them have suitable voices," answered the visitor, rather coolly.

"Dear Mrs. Gresham," said Lucile, with a pained expression in her eyes, "please do not think unkindly of me for refusing to sing; but I am thinking—I could easily get someone to sing that solo; a person with a very good voice, clear and melodeous—one exactly suited for the occasion."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Mrs. Gresham, in an incredulous tone; "who can that be?"

"An acquaintance—a music pupil of mine. She is to be here this evening to take a lesson. If you wait until she comes, I shall ask her to sing for you."

The music pupil arrived in due time and Lucile presented her to Mrs. Gresham—Nannie Dawsey.

There was something uncommonly attractive about the young girl. The thick, brown ringlets clustering around her pretty face, gave her a pert, boyish appearance, very much in keeping with her bright eyes, open countenance, and the admirable *aplomb* of her general deportment. As soon as she was seated she turned to Lucile and said: "I got a letter from Tom last night, Lucile, I have it in my pocket now," she explained, tapping on the spot where the precious epistle lay concealed; "I brought it for you to read; it is as rich as a pound-cake."

"What does he write about, Nannie?" asked Lucile, smiling; "something very interesting, I judge, by your looks."

"He tells all about the Confederates evacuating Corinth. You haven't heard about that, I'm sure."

"Of course I have."

"But you haven't read the particulars. Tom writes all about the dreadful times they've had since leaving Monterey," answered Nannie, drawing out the letter. "The water 'round that country is so scarce, and our poor boys suffered so much

from thirst, that they got to dreaming of the nice, cool water they used to have at home. They had ever so much sickness besides; and the Yankees at their heels, clear to Corinth. That terrible old Halleck followed them up, never giving them time to breathe, until he actually cornered them, and posted his guns within a thousand yards of our batteries. Gracious me! how our boys would have been peppered, if our Beauregard hadn't had the sense to slip out of that trap! Here's what Tom says about it."

Forthwith, and without any encouragement, Nannie proceeded to read her brother's description of Beauregard's noted feat. "Wasn't that a dandy move, though?" asked she, refolding her letter, and looking straight at Mrs. Gresham. "No other general but *our* Beauregard could have done it!"

"Even our enemies admit," remarked Mrs. Gresham, that this bold and admirably conducted retreat was a crushing disappointment to the Federals. The escape of that army, without bloodshed, was equal to a victory."

"Are you an admirer of Beauregard, ma'am?" abruptly asked Nannie, fixing her bright eyes on the lady's astonished visage.

"General Beauregard has been singularly devoted to our Cause," replied Mrs. Gresham, with a smile; "he commanded the troops that won our first victory. I think all Southerners should love and admire him for his brave and chivalric conduct, as well as for the genius he has displayed in managing our armies."

"I am glad you think so well of him ma'am; and I'm sorry my brother is no longer under his command. Poor Tom is in Vicksburg, now. He says he's in for good, and expects to dine off of many a rat and mule, before the war comes to an end."

The night of the entertainment was heralded by a full moon. At the hour of rising, dense and forboding clouds had banked themselves against the horizon, but the queen of night soon extricated herself from these vapory folds and proceeded with majestic serenity on her journey towards the zenith. On that particular night, she symbolized that sublime faith which had hitherto sustained the Southern people in their perilous career. The clouds, which a few months previous had darkened their political horizon, had since rolled by, and the star of Fortune had arisen to guide them in their struggles for Independence.

On Grosse Tete, the interminable fields of corn and cotton were flooded with soft, mellow light. The venerable trees leaning along the banks of the bayou, were made resplendent with the moon beams, and they quivered like gems, here and there, on the surface of the shadowy water.

The little village of Livonia presented a scene of bustle and activity never witnessed before. The roadside in the vicinity of the hall, was lined with vehicles of all sizes and descriptions, from the old-time superannuated barouches, to the stylish and elegant carriages of Grosse Tete's magnates. The sable drivers of princely equipages stood grumbling at the heads of their master's thousand-dollar teams, which chafed and fretted at their bits, and shook with impatience their silver mounted harness. On the moon-lit grounds, were booths fabricated with the tropical palmetto, and decorated with the snowy blossoms of the cape-jasmine. These were presided over by dark-eyed beauties, who dispensed with grace and brilliant repartee, Confederate wares and dainties. Here were served in porcelain and cut glass, corn and potato coffee, home-made syrups and wines. Great pyramids of Confederate cake fell in tempting morsels under the carver's knife.

Heaped in crystal stands and magnificent punch-bowls, were delicious peaches floating in cream. The tempting fragrance of *gumbo-filé* drifting from huge pots, filled the air with gastronomic invitations. Beauty and youth had met in the brilliantly lighted hall, and the hot breath of patriotism had swept asunder every social barrier. The *élite* of society had clasped hands with their humbler sisterhood, and combined their zeal and talent in the furtherance of the Cause, so dear to every heart in the Southland.

The performance was opened with the patriotic song of "Dixie," which was, at that time, all the rage in the Southern States. The stanzas were sung by one of the company. He was joined in the chorus by a goodly number of his "comrades in grey," a circumstance which tended to enhance the rendition of it, and which aroused the audience to an outburst of prolonged and enthusiastic cheers. It is useless to go into details in describing the performance that night. Each roll in the programme, from the overture to the last tableau, was carried out with exquisite taste and perfection. Then, came the intermission of thirty minutes, after which the curtain was to rise for the grand finale.

In due time the vast audience had repacked the hall, and the tinkling bell was sending every heart to its owner's lips.

The curtain rolled slowly upwards, revealing by degrees the gorgeous scene behind, through the medium of an ethereal rosy cloud. A murmur of admiration rippled through the hall as the audience grasped the significance of the magnificent *coup d'oeul*. The stage, resplendent with flowers and shimmering draperies, dawned upon the sight like a fairy scene. In the midst of it stood a group of young girls, each bearing the coat-of-arms of one of the Confederate States. The flagbearer, beautiful as a houri, stood prominently in front of

her companions. The silkenfolds of her handsoemly wrought banner, caressed her elegant figure, as perfect in grace of pose as that of a statue. In the rear of the stage, a young girl sat at a grand piano. At the rising of the curtain, her skillful fingers ran swiftly over the keys, and the air of the "Bonnie Blue Flag" dropped pearl-like, on the perfumed atmosphere.

Suddenly, a voice caught the first note of the accompaniment, and rippled forth as clear, as pure and as free as that of a prima-donna. Stanza after stanza went up on the wings of that sweet voice, interrupted only by those who joined in the grand chorus. The heart of the audience stood still until the last echo of the song had faded into silence. Then, as by common impulse, the people rose to their feet, applauding, cheering, weeping. A storm of flowers fell upon the stage. A young girl, with the face of a wild rose, stood before them, bowing, smiling, and gathering up their offerings so thickly strewn at her feet. Lucile looked into her pupil's radiant countenance and whispered: "I am proud of you Nannie."

After the noise and excitement had somewhat subsided, Corine Gresham walked towards the foot-lights; upon her had fallen the honor of presenting the flag to the departing company. All hearts throbbed with emotion at the sight of the beautiful girl, clasping the staff which bore aloft the ensign of their love and predilection. Her delicately chiseled features and lily-like complexion, were crowned by the aureole of her pale-gold hair, catching the light at every movement of her graceful form—aside from her striking personality, which excited general admiration. The office devolved upon her seemed to have consecrated her to the Cause the people had so warmly advocated. They listened in silent awe to the touching address delivered to the "boys in grey," and their

gallant leader. Whether through coquetry, or under the influence of her patriotic feeling, Corine, before parting with the flag, pressed to her scarlet lips, the tassels which decorated the extremities of the cords. This simple act once more thrilled the spectators into prolonged cheers, until drowned by the music and rousing song which was to close the performance.

“Sons of freedom, on to glory!
Go where brave men do or die.
Let your name, in future story,
Gladden every patriot's eye.
“’Tis your country calls you; hasten!
Backward hurl the invading foe;
Freemen never think of danger,
To the glorious battle, go!”

CHAPTER XV.

AT CORNE À CHEVREUIL.

One morning, in the latter part of October, Lucile sat at her piano practicing "Acher's Contemplations." She had drawn the curtains aside, that she might lose nothing of the ideal day, or of the unclouded sky which revealed itself in cerulean patches between the branches of an oak near by. But she was in no humor for study; her fingers wandered passively over the keys as she gazed at the royal dahlias nodding in the stiff breeze, or listened to the shrill notes of a locust concealed in the lichened bark. A mocking-bird, in an olive bush, began pouring out its little soul in mimic lays. "It would never do to compete with you; little fellow," thought Lucile; withdrawing her hands from the board. She had just placed before her, the beautiful song, "All Quiet Along the Potomac To-night."

"I wonder if you sang as well when you first started to practice, birdie?" was her mental query. "You were not like us stupid people, who have to work all our lives improving the gifts nature bestows upon us."

Her reverie came to an abrupt termination and the charming *coup d'oeil* was instantaneously intercepted by a pair of soft hands laid firmly across her eyes.

"'Tis you, Rosanna; I know by your tapering fingers!" exclaimed Lucile, seizing her friend's hands. "I'm glad you came," she continued, turning on the revolving stool and passing her arms affectionately around her waist, "I thought of

riding out to your place this evening and delivering a message I had for you, and as I know you will never guess from whom, I shall tell you; it is from *Grandpère*."

"From Mr. Lafitte?" cried Rosanna, with a glow of pleasure flitting across her lovely countenance, "how kind of him to remember me, at all."

"He has taken quite a fancy to you, and wants me to bring you out next Wednesday, to spend a whole week at *Corne à Chevreuil*. They started the mill yesterday; everything will be in full blast by the time we get there."

"I shall be but too happy to accept the kind invitation. I think the old place is the dearest one on earth to visit, and your grandparents, the sweetest and most picturesque old people I ever met."

"We must be up with the lark Wednesday morning," said Lucile, with a beaming smile; "an early drive through those woods in fall, is worth the sacrifice of one's nap after morning coffee."

"And False River is such an enchanting region," replied Rosanna; "so full of quaint scenery, of flower gardens and pretty sugar plantations. I do love to see the waving cane fields and smell the odor of boiling cane juice."

"Then you shall soon, I hope, have the satisfaction of inhaling a whole 'seasonful' of the tempting odors, for papa intends turning into a sugar planter as soon as the war is over; and I now extend you an unlimited invitation to spend with me the pleasures of our first grinding."

"That time may be a long way off, Lucile; still, I shall pin to my heart your gracious invitation. But I must not forget to show you this," continued the girl, drawing from her belt a slip of paper. "Oh, Mrs. Hunt! come in, I want you

to guess the name of the author of this beautiful war-song. It was written by some one living out on False River."

Mrs. Hunt was on the gallery, pruning her pot-plants; she entered the room with her shears and a handful of withered leaves and flowers. "I was not aware," she remarked, seating herself at the edge of the sofa, "that False River counted poets among her other attractions; read the verses—one of you—that I may form an opinion."

"Well, mamma," said Lucile, who held the paper, "listen, the title of the song is, 'My Maryland,'—it should have been, My Louisiana—and I am prejudiced against the writer for overlooking his own state."

"The despot's heel is on thy shore,
Maryland!

His torch is at thy temple door,
Maryland,

Avenge the patriotic gore,
That flecked the streets of Baltimore,
Maryland, my Maryland.

"Dear Mother, burst the tyrant's chain,
Maryland,

Virginia should not call in vain,
Maryland,

She meets her sisters on the plain—
'*Sic semper*'—'tis the proud refrain
That baffles minions back amain,
Maryland, my Maryland!

"I hear the distant thunder hum,
Maryland,

The old line bugle, fife and drum,
Maryland.

She is not dead, nor deaf, nor dumb.
Huzzah! she spurns the northern skum;
She breathes—she burns—she'll come!
She'll come!

Maryland, my Maryland."

"The author is certainly a patriot, and his song is full of stirring sentiment," said Mrs. Hunt, with warmth. "It would make a glorious song, if some one would only set it to music."

"But it has already been set to music, Mrs. Hunt, and I have sent for the song. They say that the air is quite in keeping with these noble thoughts."

"Tell me who wrote this?" asked Lucile.

"Professor Randall, and he wrote it while he was teaching at the Poydras college. He is a Marylander."

"I humbly beg his pardon then," cried Lucile, "and I now honor him for his genius, and for the devotion which inspired him in the writing of this beautiful song."

Dave drove the girls out Wednesday morning, bright and early. It was a perfect day, and the drive through the woods and over the hard, smooth roads, was most enjoyable. The crisp, bracing air was fragrant with woodland odors, and the ditches on the roadside were radiant with lupins and the scarlet flowers of the wild sage. As they bowled along, the girls expatiated on the variety of hues assumed by the different kinds of trees, from the diminutive sassafras, in crimson robes, to the towering cypress, silhouetting its purple tufts against the sky. On leaving the woods, they came across immense cane fields, swaying in undulating waves in the mellow sunlight. The metallic cling-clang, of the cutter's knives mingled harmoniously with the rumbling of wagons. From the escape valves, the steam buffeted the air in regular and almost voluptuous sounds; and the white vapors, rising from the kettles, floated off to sweeten and purify the earth.

Lucile and Rosanna found Mrs. Lafitte in the dining-room, superintending the breakfast in preparation for the

white men employed at the sugar-house. The former, with mischievous playfulness, inspected with pretended longing the well provisioned tray, which Plaisance, the housekeeper, was about lifting to her turbaned head.

“Dear me!” she exclaimed, “you have mustered a breakfast fit for a king; a roasted chicken, fried ribs, fricasseed liver, and an omelette *soufflée*; all this is enough to make the mouth of an epicure water. I declare! here’s a pot of *café au lait*—most people have forgotten the taste of Java. Why, *Grandmère*, have you and Plaisance been in underhand traffic with the Yankees?”

“Dat good Confed’rite *café*, yes;” answered the domestic, shaking with good-humored laughter; “yo’ nose no smell good *mamzelle*, dat not’in’ but suga’ parch coffee.”

“Do you mean to tell me, that this stuff is made of p—par—burnt sugar?”

“I does so, dat heap better den corn an’ ’tater; w’en I cum back I learn you;” answered the bustling slave, tripping off with her load with as much cheerfulness and agility as though she had merely donned her straw hat and was off for a jaunt. By the way, Plaisance was quite an important personage in the household; she was seamstress and general manager, and was of invaluable worth to her aged mistress, who, of late, had grown so feeble as to be unable to attend to her domestic duties.

The girls had been promised a breakfast equal to that prepared for the workmen, with the addition of English dairy cheese, and a plate of “baignees” fritters, served with new syrup. In the meantime, they had been invited to sit awhile in *grandmère’s* bed-room, a cool and spacious apartment, filled with old-fashioned furniture. The most conspicuous of the lot were two imposing bedsteads, piled to a great height with

moss and feather mattresses. Their seemingly unattainable altitude had long been a matter of wonder and anxious speculation to Lucile. There was a time when she believed that her grandparents *never* went to bed but sat in their *fauteuils* night after night, from sheer inability to climb their too luxurious couches. But "*la pièce de résistance*" was a magnificent mahogany armoire, ornamented with brass nobbs and hinges. Lucile, and sometimes the little household darkies, would stand before it and gaze in wonderment at their tiny figures grotesquely reflected on its polished surface. The latter, in order to increase the effect, would stretch their mouths into hideous contortions, and protrude their eyeballs to a most alarming extent.

After installing her grandmother in the comfortable *fauteuil*, Lucile perched herself on one of its arms and proceeded to lavish upon her the most endearing marks of affection. She laid her graceful head upon the old lady's shoulder and gently stroked her cheek. "Dearest *Grandmère*," she said, "you look so tired, let me manage things while I stay; you know I'm a first-rate housekeeper."

She had been struck with the change time had wrought on that sweet, placid face; there were signs of weariness and sadness lurking in those dark eyes. But *grandmère* was still very lovely, notwithstanding the weight of years resting on her silvery head. Her soft, wavy hair was still coquettishly tucked with the cutest of combs, and the white kerchief which adorned her shoulders, was of the daintiest fabric. *Grandmère* could not speak a word of English, and Lucile was appointed interpreter for the time being. "*Ton amie me fait l'idée d'une violette*," she remarked to Lucile, "*elle est si charmante, je l'aime beaucoup*."

“*Grandmère* thinks you as sweet as a violet, Rosanna, and she says she loves you dearly,” echoed Lucile, glancing up with a pleased look.

“It would never do for me to tell her how good and beautiful I think her;” answered Rosanna, looking at her friend with a puzzled expression; “she will believe I am only flattering her.”

“Oh, no, she won’t,” replied Lucile; “she’s a sort of physiognomist, and can see at a glance that you are not a fraud.”

“Then, she knows I love her,” exclaimed the girl, rising from her seat. It was pretty to see her fluttering hesitation before stooping over to kiss *grandmère’s* soft cheek. Like a ray of sunshine streaming over a wintry landscape, a rosy tinge of pleasure flitted across the aged countenance. She laid her hand affectionately upon that of Rosanna, and smilingly drew her to a seat beside her.

Lucile had much to tell her grandmother. First, she gave her all the war news, then told what pleasure she took in making garments for the dear Confederate soldiers. She inquired affectionately about her precious *grandpère*, who had been ill from a recent attack of vertigo. This indisposition had been aggravated by moral as well as physical causes. Discouraging reports from the seat of war had contributed to harass and dishearten the aged planter, and to fill his life with continual worry and apprehension. Lincoln’s preliminary proclamation, issued a few months previous, had produced great excitement throughout the Southern States. The threat in the emancipation document was received with conflicting emotions. Some considered it unconstitutional and protested bitterly against it; others waited in silent and anxious forebodings for the approaching hour, when Lincoln, with a fell sweep of his pen,

would despoil them of their hard-earned and legitimate property. These undisputed facts and gloomy outlooks produced terrible effects on the old people of the parish. Many offered but feeble resistance to the tide of coming events, and the credulous and simple-minded old planters of False River were among the first to succumb to the cruel fortunes of war.

After partaking of a hearty breakfast, Lucile and her companion started off for the sugar house. They chatted as gayly as two magpies, as they tripped over the rustling cane foliage, scattered along the wagon-road. How pleasant was the prospect before them! The emerald cane field, the sugar mill with the bustling scene around it, and the blue, primitive woods beyond. The songs of the negroes at work, came in broken refrains on the bracing air. They were blissfully free from the cares and anxieties, and ignorant of the causes which worried and harrassed their old master's mind. They would stop work to tell a joke or watch the noisy crows, wheeling among the pecan trees. On reaching their destination, the girls ran up the narrow steps of the engine room in search of M. Lafitte. He was not to be found, nor was he at the equipage, where the *vin de canne* (cane juice) and *cuite* boiled furiously in the two last kettles. They waited to see the hands draw a strike, then adjourned to the cooling room, or *purgerie*. A couple of boys were making the rounds, dabbling wooden paddles into the coolers for a taste of the *cuite* (cooked syrup), which was seen in different conditions, from the boiling point to the granulated. This is always a very attractive compartment to the lovers of the toothsome article; especially to children, who are never debarred from the privilege of dipping their tiny paddles into the contents of any of the coolers ranged on trestles above the concave cisterns. Lucile and Rosanna leaned over the bridge, and gazed with childish in-

terest at their reflections in the glassy surface of the lake of rich syrup.

“An awful sensation creeps over me each time I see my reflection down there,” remarked Lucile, with a little shudder. “It looks as though some wicked gnome had transported me to a dismal bottomless region and turned me into black marble.”

“What an extravagant idea!” cried Rosanna, laughing. “But really, we do make strange and uncanny figures down there; wouldn’t we be in a predicament if we were to fall in? What is that over yonder, Lucile? some living thing swimming towards us—let us get out of here, child!”

“It is only a rat crossing the Acheron,” observed Lucile; “I must call some one to his rescue.” They stepped under the shed, where a dozen young negroes were industriously piling cane on the carrier. The fascinating revolution of the pondrous vehicle, gliding upwards with the sinuous motion of a serpent, so absorbed the attention of the girls, that for a time, the pressing necessities of the unfortunate rodent had entirely escaped their memory.

“Oh!” exclaimed Lucile, with a jerk, “that drowning rat!” Then turning to one of the lads who was shucking cane, she said; “Julien, get a hoe or something, and haul out a poor rat that is drowning in the cistern.”

Julien stared at Lucile with perplexity stamped on his grinning visage. “We nebber bodder de rats, little mistis; w’en dey takes a notion to drown deysef, we nebber hinders ’em.”

“How vexing! Where is your master?”

The boy cast his eyes across the broad expanse before him. “Dere he,” he cried, pointing to one of the headlands.

M. Lafitte had just emerged from a cut of tall cane, which had completely hidden him from view. He had thrown his bridle rein across the pommel of the saddle, and rode with his head bent low, as if in deep meditation.

Lucile noticed with affectionate alarm, the stoop in his shoulders, and the air of weariness with which he held himself in the saddle. "Poor darling!" she exclaimed, wiping the tears from her long lashes; "he is growing old, and is losing that beautiful and erect bearing of which I was so proud."

"Is your grandfather so very old, Lucile?" asked Rosanna, with concern; "To me he seems the personification of strength and health."

"*Grandpère* is eighty. It is too sad to think of his great age. Before the war broke out, he looked like a man of seventy. He has changed sadly since then."

With a face glowing with animation, Lucile bounded forward to meet her venerable relative. "*Grandpère!* Old Precious!" she cried.

"M. Lafitte alighted from his horse with joyful alacrity. "*Tiens! tiens! voila ma p'tite!*" He extended his arms, and Lucile nestled her pretty head on his broad bosom.

"*Combien j'avais envie de te voir!*" he exclaimed, affectionately kissing her rosy cheeks.

M. Lafitte greeted Rosanna with cordiality. "Me mighty glad you come see de ole peoples," he said, taking her by the hand. "Me keep you an' Lucile all de grin'in' time, hey? Big 'ouse, big yiard fur to play. Plenty cane an' oringe fur to suck; *cuite, vin de canne*, all dat. You got fur to stay—w'at you tell, hey?"—

Here Lucile uttered a little scream, which she had tried in vain to throttle with her handkerchief. "Don't get mad, darling; I couldn't help laughing; you talk to Rosanna as

though she was a little girl; why, she is a grown up young lady, *grandpère*! Don't you see how you have shocked her vanity."

"You must not mind Lucile, Mr. Lafitte," said Rosanna, laying her hand respectfully on his arm, "I'm but too glad to be taken for a child. I am one in disposition, if not in years, and I want you to treat me just as you do Lucile."

"She my leetle Injin gyrl," he replied, gathering Lucile in his arms; "her papa raise her in de woods; me want her to stay yere fur to see de big warl."

The week at *Corne à Chevreuil* glided by like a dream. The girls, each day, made a trip to the mill, when it was in operation. They dearly loved to be with *grandpère*; to sit with him on the platform, in full view of the heaving engine and the revolving rollers, which munched with insatiable avidity, the purple stalks falling incessantly into their iron maws. M. Lafitte would each day peel for them, the white, tender cane he selected from the great heaps under the shed. Sometimes he brought them a glass of *vin de canne*, perfumed with fine old brandy, or a plate of caramel he detached from the sugar-wagon with his pocket-knife. Once, Herbert and Mrs. Hunt came to spend the day. The surprise added much to their enjoyment. They never had a better time. Why, even *grandmère*, grown young again, had condescended to climb into the cane wagon, which, by the way, Lucile denominated the "New Confederate Wagon," and all the way home the young folks sang with glee, the new version:—

"Come, all ye sons of Freedom,
And join our Southern band;
We're going to fight the Yankees,
And drive them from our land.
Justice is our motto,

And Providence our guide,
So jump into the wagon,
And we'll all take a ride."

(Then the Chorus):—

"So wait for the wagon, the new Confederate wagon,
The dear Secession wagon, and we'll all take a ride."

Grandmère's garden was a paradise, a mass of entangled loveliness. If ever there was a tree, a shrub, or an herb, that refused to grow in that favored spot, Lucile could not find it in her botanical vocabulary. For the past ten years, *grandmère* and Plaisance had been planting flowers for *la p'tite*; and a mania had seized them, to thrust into the ground every root or cutting legitimately falling into their hands. These had all taken kindly to the soil; they grew, flourished, and fraternized; distilling their odors, and conveying delightful thoughts and revelations to the old people, who, for so long had remained unsusceptible to the mysterious beauties of nature. This miscellaneous assemblage had been planted without regularity or picturesque arrangement, and had thrived in all sorts of localities. The cabbage bed was bordered with violets and thyme. Roses, poppies and balsams disputed territory with the beans and squashes; fruit trees of every variety, protested against the aggressive honeysuckle and climbing roses. There was always some delightful attraction in this garden of Eden. In early spring, yellow bunches of Japan plums glittered like gold among the dark green foliage of the trees; then came mulberries and plums and peaches; later on, the figs and apples and oranges. Each morning the girls came here to pluck oranges and gather the creamy flowers of the sweet olive, to strew on *grandmère's* bed. But this life of pleasantness was fast coming to a close. Two days more were left of the memorable week; the morrow was All-Saints' day, and M. Lafitte

was going to take the girls to St. Francis' Church, that they might witness the touching and beautiful ceremony of the decoration of the graves. Lucile and Rosanna were anxious to visit the ancient and historic church, and the cemetery where reposed the ashes of the oldest inhabitants of the parish.

A capacious bedroom, adjoining that of the aged couple, had been allotted the girls. The white walls and immaculately clean floor, received each morning a brief visit from the sun, which straggled in from between the leaves of a magnificent catalpa, shading the front gallery. Lucile was too fond a lover of the cheerful sunlight to confine herself to this dingy apartment. With her grandmother's permission, she occupied during the day *la chambre à ronet*, as it was styled, because an ancient spinning-wheel, had for years held undisputed possession of one of the corners. As this room was at the gable end, with its windows facing the south, the sunbeams came dancing in at their own sweet will, at all hours of the day. Sometimes they made a leap for the mantle-piece, where stood an old French clock, with its hands forever pointing to half-past two; then again they crept under the treadle of the wheel, as if to steal its mouldering memories. This family relic possessed a strange fascination to Lucile. From the time of her earliest childhood, she remembered how her grandmother used to set it a humming for her special delectation. When she grew older, and could work the treadle herself, it became her chief source of amusement during her visits to her grandparents. But she had been told since, of a wierd superstition connected with it, and she ceased to tamper with the thing. The tradition was, that the wheel, without human intervention, whirled for a minute or two, some weeks previous to the occurrence of a death in the family. Its premonitory gyrations were heard a fort-

night prior to Eugene Lafitte's untimely end; and it faithfully predicted the approaching death of each member who so closely followed him to the bourne of shadows.

It was All-Hallowe'en; both girls were sitting in this chamber; Rosanna had been stitching lace on one of Mrs. Lafitte's neckkerchiefs; she arose, laid it on the bed, and smoothly folded it. Fearing to disturb Lucile, who was diligently writing a letter, she stepped softly around the apartment, examining the quaint and nearly obliterated pictures on the wall, and other curious objects about her. When she came to the spinning-wheel, she placed her hand upon it and gave it a turn; it began to whirl with a dismal, creaking sound.

"O, my goodness, don't!" Lucile cried, with unwonted agitation in her manner.

"What's the matter, Lucile? you look as though I had awakened to life one of your ancestors."

"I cannot bear to see that wheel turning; please do not touch it again, Rosanna!"

"Certainly not, since it makes you so nervous."

Lucile had not told her friend of the superstition associated with the wheel.

"Go on with your writing," said Rosanna, "while I sit here and peel these oranges; we shall eat them when you get through."

But Lucile laid down her pen and silently watched the autumn leaves pirouetting in the air. "We may as well give up the idea of going to Pointe Coupee to-morrow," she remarked, after a moment's abstraction; "we are going to have dreadful weather to-night; listen to the wind howling around the corner!"

“Then don’t finish your letter this evening,” replied Rosanna, displaying the tempting slices of the oranges on the back of Tennyson’s poems. “Let us finish the Princess before supper; we have only three pages more to read.”

After supper the girls, as was their wont, spent the evening in *grandmère’s* room. They were unusually merry and played “*Retrouvons nos Moutons*” with the old folks. *Grand-père* could not compete in agility with his frisky, frolicsome guests; and the way they got him in the brambles, was a thing to laugh at, and they did laugh, until the tears streamed down their rosy cheeks. Then *grandmère* got them to sing. Lucile, in a sweet, pathetic voice, sang her favorite, “*C’est Toi.*”

Ce qu’il me faut à moi,
 Pour que mon triste cœur
 Renaîsse à l’espérance
 Et reprenne courage.
 C’est le bois fremissant
 Et son paisible ombrage
 On l’on rêve au bonheur,
 Ce qu’il me faut à moi—
 C’est toi. C’est toi.”

When these two came to bid the venerable couple good-night, M. Lafitte said to them, with a voice full of emotion, “If only I could keep you here, always, I should never grow older or brood over coming troubles. *Mon Dieu*, how sad it will be after you are gone!”

That night Lucile was awakened from her slumbers by the noise of the wind whistling viciously around the house. As she listened, it increased in violence, and began dashing itself with impotent rage against the front doors. This brought on a disinclination to sleep and made her restless. “I shall get up and read a while,” she thought, rising softly, for fear of

waking her friend. She struck a match, lighted the tallow candle on the mantle-piece, and tip-toed into the next room, where she had left her books. She placed the light on the table near the window, and stood for a moment watching the murky clouds and the trees swaying in the wind. The rain splashed in fitful gusts against the glass, and a few rain drops splattered in her face. The sight of her writing materials reminded her of the unfinished letter. "*C'est vrai!*" she exclaimed, "I can finish my letter; tomorrow morning *grand-père* will send it to the postoffice." She seated herself, dipped the pen in the ink, and wrote:—

"I left off here, dear Madge, to eat an orange and chat with a friend, who is spending a week here at *Corne à Chevreuil*. I have already spoken to you of my venerable relatives, but I never could give you a correct idea of their peaceful life here in this old homestead, full of relics and interesting souvenirs. Our visit is nearly ended and it saddens me to think how lonely the old people will be after we are gone. They are both quite old and feeble, and in sore need of someone to cheer them up, especially in those war times, when fear and excitement alone, would have a tendency to shorten their lives. The thought is a source of much unhappiness to me. I began this letter before supper; after spending a few hours with my grand parents, I went to bed and was soon lulled to sleep by the leaves rustling over the gallery floor. I love to hear them at night, when I am half asleep. I make believe they are spirits madly tumbling about in the darkness. It is a delicious kind of fear which overcomes me and makes me drowsy. I was awakened by the noise the wind made among the catalpa trees. As sleep had fled from my eyes, I got up with the intention of watching the storm, but the sight of this letter reminded me of my promise to you."

Suddenly a familiar sound fell upon Lucile's ear. "Click-clack," as though the old wheel was making a supreme effort to start. Her pen was arrested, and her heart stood still. A deathly silence succeeded. "There is a mouse fumbling in that corner," Lucile half whispered to herself; "I wish he would go about his business."

The intruder, however, had scattered her ideas. She dipped her pen in the ink and prepared to resume her writing. But it was no easy task to divert her mind from the ominous sound, which had filled her with vague misgivings.

"Click-clack-click;" the wheel to her horror, now broke into a furious whirl. A cold blast, generated by its swift revolutions, struck her bloodless cheeks, and a black pall fell between her and the light. Lucile fell in a faint across the table.

At this period of the war, coffee was a scarce article in most families, but Mrs. Lafitte hoarded, as misers hoard gold, a certain quantity of fine coffee left from an old and plentiful supply, a portion of which was periodically roasted and carefully pulverized in a wooden mortar made for that special purpose. A decoction of this priceless article was served as a tonic to each member of the household at an early hour of each morning. On All Saints' day, Plaisance, as usual, walked into the girls' room carrying the plateau upon which she had placed the two antique coffee cups. The beverage instantaneously filled the apartment with its delicious aroma.

"Yere yo' cafe, *mamzelles!*" she called, pulling at the quilt and giving a vigorous shake at the foremost occupant of the bed.

Lucile opened her eyes and stared at Plaisance with a bewildered expression. "Was it you who brought me back to bed?" she asked in a tremulous tone of voice.

"Me bring you back ware, *'tite mamzelle?*"

"Brought me back from that room after I fainted."

"What are you talking about, Lucile?" demanded Rosanna, sitting up in bed and looking at her companion with eyes expanded with astonishment. "Who said you had fainted?"

"I know I did, for I don't remember coming back to bed."

"You have been lying here, sound asleep all night, Lucile; you must have dreamed of having fainted."

Lucile gave no answer, but rolled out of bed and rushed into the adjoining room. There were the writing materials, just as she had left them before going to supper. She snatched from the table the unfinished letter, expecting to find the lines she had written at that terrible moment in the night, but not a word could she find of the subject which had made such a profound impression on her mind. A leaden weight seemed lifted from her soul, she laid down the epistle with a fervent "Thank God! it was only a dream!" But her eye fell upon the wheel; its outlines, half shrouded in shadows, seemed invested with supernatural powers. She was seized with an indefinable dread lest she would once again become the unwilling spectator of its sinister proceedings. Stifling a little nervous cry, she sprang back into her own room, exclaiming, "It was only a dream, Rosanna, only a dream!"

CHAPTER XVI.

JOURNEYING TO SAINT FRANCIS' CHURCH.

ON a cold dreary day in January, a funeral cortege slowly wended its way along the bank of False River. The waters no longer reflected the *lapis lazuli* of the sky, or the rose and purple tints of luminous clouds, but flung themselves in tumultuous waves against the shore, sobbing with moan and low-voiced *miserères*.

"Draw your hood closer over your face, daughter; do you not feel the wind?" asked Mr. Hunt of Lucile, who sat beside him in the carriage next to the hearse.

"I feel nothing, papa," she answered, opening for a moment, her large, sad eyes; "nothing but a cruel pain at my heart;" and her dark lashes dropped heavily on her wan cheeks, closing the prospect on those orbs, once so alert and eager to grasp and speculate on every passing object. Mr. Hunt gazed with concern upon the sweet, tear-stained face of his child, but made no effort to comfort her. He knew that grief had laid a crushing hand upon her young, faithful heart, and it was best to leave her to the luxury of her sorrow.

He sat silently watching the dull, monotonous scenery through which they passed—a strip of woods stretching between the town of New Roads and the cultivated lands on the bank of the Mississippi river. In some places the road was so narrow that the branches of trees met half way across, forming an arch overhead. The trailing moss, under the impulsion of the fierce, north wind, now lashed and tormented

the naked trees, then fell resignedly in the air, like melancholy banners weeping over the dead. The long line of carriages plodding through the soft black mud, had reached the open country; a locality abounding in flourishing sugar plantations. As they approached their destination, Mr. Hunt caught a glimpse of the steeple of old Saint Francis' Church, peering from among an assemblage of evergreen pines, cedars and dark-hued cypresses. They over-shadowed the graves and monuments, crowding each other, and keeping vigil over the sleepers, murmuring, sighing, and intoning dirges or soothing psalmodes. The first stroke of the tolling bell aroused Lucile from her apparent apathy; she started in her seat and cast a look full of anguish upon the black hearse in front of her. "*Grandpère!*" she exclaimed in a low, suppressed tone of voice; "O, my precious *grandpère!*"

"Lucile, darling!" said her father, passing his arm around her shivering form, "control your feelings; you must not grieve thus; you will make yourself ill."

"O, papa! I cannot help grieving for him—my own—own—dearest *grandpère!*" she answered, turning upon him a look of piteous entreaty; he loved us so, papa, and we shall never see him again—never—never!"

Mr. Hunt felt the justice of her reproach and remorse smote his heart like a dagger. "I know but too well how legitimate is your sorrow, Lucile, for he was worthy of our deepest love and deserves our lasting regret. But it is wrong to deplore his death as an eternal separation; shall we not follow him sooner or later, and be reunited to him in another life?"

"God grant it!" she answered with great earnestness; then, after a brief silence, she remarked: "He had promised to bring us here next Easter, and I was looking forward to that

day with such pleasant anticipations; little did I dream of coming with him thus—with his poor hands crossed over his breast, and his dear face forever hidden from my sight—so soon, too—so soon. “My precious!” here she burst into an uncontrolable fit of sobbing. Her father allowed her to give full vent to her emotions; knowing that nothing else could relieve her overburdened heart.

Mr. Lafitte's remains were carried to the rear of the cemetery, and placed in a large tomb, with those of his father and brothers. After the funeral solemnities, the assistants dispersed about the place and strolled along the well kept paths and alleys. Some lingered in prayer near the resting places of friends or relatives; others, rambling over the grounds, examining inscriptions on the tombs or on some half crumbling monument—“A relic left like a wreck upon the distant shores of time.” Wreaths of immortelles and other decorative mementoes, though faded and wind-tossed, still hung to some of the monuments. As Mr. Hunt walked through these silently crowded aisles thickly strewn with “memory's offerings,” he pondered on the salutary influence, such touching devotion might produce on the living, and regretted that the custom was confined to Catholic congregations.

On their return from Pointe Coupee, Lucile found her grandmother in a very critical condition. She had just recovered from a swoon and lay with her languid eyes fixed on the clock on the mantle-piece. One of the neighbors, who had been standing by Mr. Lafitte's deathbed, had arrested the pendulum at the moment of his demise. It was a strange coincidence, the hands pointed precisely to “half-past two,” the hour denoted by the old clock in “*la chambre a rouet*.” Mrs. Hunt and Lucile made generous and heroic efforts to subdue their own grief, for the sake of the dear one whose loss was

irreparable, and for whose wounded heart the earth held no balm.

The night after the funeral, Mrs. Hunt sat at her mother's bedside, listening sadly to her spasmodic breathing and to the low, pitiful moans, which occasionally escaped her pale, thin lips. Lucile kept watch with her mother, but from time to time, she crept into her own room to give vent to her overflowing heart. There were so many things around her to remind her of the dear, departed one; they haunted her and prayed upon her mind, with sharp and cruel persistence. Once, her eyes fell upon her grandfather's old hat, hanging upon the familiar wooden peg; her heart gave a great throb, and a smothered cry escaped her lips. Her mother, with an inquiring glance, turned her colorless face towards her. But the poor child had already buried her head into her lap, trying to stifle the convulsive sobs which shook her delicate frame. Her prolonged vigils and exhausting fatigues, at length overpowered her, and she lost in profound sleep, all consciousness of her sad surroundings. Mrs. Hunt and Plaisance watched with anxious solicitude, the beloved patient, until she, too, to their great relief, fell into tranquil slumber. Thus, that dreary, desolate, and interminable night, with its leaden-footed hours, passed through the echoless portals of eternity.

Mrs. Hunt walked softly to the window and lifted the curtain to take a peep at the outer world, hoping against hope, to find some shred with which to bind her bleeding, disconsolate heart. Far away, across the river and high above the misty woods, dawn was approaching. The curtains of mysterious night had been torn asunder, and a solitary star flashed in the crimson of a crystal sky. Mrs. Hunt fixed her earnest gaze on the brilliant spectacle, and her thoughts wondered in solemn conjectures, beyond earthly cares and tribulations. This

earth, she knew, was but an atom, compared with other systems in the universe; but now it seemed to her only "a vale of tears," through which mortals journeyed on their way to a happier sphere of life. "Perhaps," she mused, "God has planted his throne in the center of this glorious universe, and these shining stars are in reality, the many mansions alluded to by our Divine Saviour. And it might be that my dearest father has already reached one of these beautiful abodes. Wherever he be, God grant that we may some day rejoin him. His guileless, upright and toilsome career on earth, certainly obtained for him a blissful eternity; and none of his loved ones need fear to meet him in the realm of his new existence." Here she was overcome by the tenderness of her emotions; her bosom heaved and sorrowful tears streamed abundantly down her cheeks. She dropped the curtain and returned to her mother's bedside, where she knelt with her rosary in her hand. She was still engaged in prayer, when Mrs. Lafitte awoke. On looking up, Mrs. Hunt was struck with the change that had taken place in her mother's appearance during the short interval consecrated to her devotions. The dull, hopeless expression had vanished, and one of pathetic sweetness and resignation had taken its place.

"Can I do anything for you, dearest mother?" asked Mrs. Hunt, bending with loving solicitude over the gentle sufferer.

Mrs. Lafitte gazed at her with a confused and perplexed expression in her eyes. "Why did you awake me, Elise? I was happier in my sleep; I am sorry you brought me back to the sad realities of this wretched life."

"Dearest, do not speak so; your words distress me. Do you not love us enough to make an effort to regain your

strength and health that you might live for our sake—Lucile's and mine?"

"Dear child, if you knew what has just passed between us, you would not urge me to stay."

"You have been dreaming, mother."

"You are mistaken. I never was more conscious of my sorrowful existence than at the moment your father appeared to me. He stood here, at my bedside, gazing on me with a look full of tenderness—then he laid his hand upon mine, saying: 'Dear wife, it is not for long; death shall not separate us!' The touch of his hand was as palpable to me as that of a living being, Elise; and I felt it for a considerable time after he had spoken."

It was Mrs. Hunt who, in kneeling, had laid a lingering hand upon her mother's. She knew that this external impression had contributed to intensify the conviction of the imaginary presence; she opened her lips to undeceive her mother, but the serene and heavenly expression of her countenance disconcerted her. She could not make up her mind to dispel the sweet delusion which had served to assuage her grief and had buoyed up her spirits by the hope of a speedy reunion.

"It may be, dear one," she answered, stroking the soft white hair of the aged widow, "that God does permit the spirits of those we love to hover around us during the first period of our bereavement, to soothe our souls and comfort us by the intuitive knowledge of their presence. Great and good men have believed this, and written most touchingly on the subject." She remembered Longfellow's beautiful lines:

"Then the forms of the departed
Enter the open door;
The beloved, the true hearted
Come to visit me once more."

"But dearest mother," she continued, "our imagination has a great deal to do with such things; our dreams are very vivid, and lead us to believe as real experiences, what are only the creations of a morbid brain, or the effects of nervous debility."

"Elise, my child," answered her mother, after a moment's reflection, "the visit I received from your father, was not a mental delusion, but a warning of my approaching death, a call to which I shall gladly respond. I know that I shall never more rise from this bed."

"O mother, do not leave us! what shall we do without you?" cried Mrs. Hunt, bursting into tears. "Have we not enough to suffer from the blow that has just fallen upon us?"

"You will have your husband and child to comfort you, my daughter, but I am alone, and I cannot live without him. This house will seem like a tomb, and I shall feel like a ghost haunting its emptiness. How can you ask me to lead such a dreary, hopeless existence?"

"But mother, my dearest mother, you will not remain here and lead this lonely life. As soon as you are restored to health, you shall go with us to Grosse Tete, where your children shall comfort and cherish you, and help you to bear the cross God has seen fit to lay upon your shoulder."

"O Elise, I pray you!" cried the aged woman clasping her hands in pitiable supplication; "do not take me away from my old home. It is so dear to me! A thousand associations bind it to my poor, bruised heart. Let me stay until I die—it will not be for long."

There was a look of distress in her sunken eyes, and a peculiar contraction around her mouth which filled Mrs. Hunt with apprehension. She hastened to awake Plaisance, who had fallen asleep on a pallet in an adjoining room. The opiate

they administered, and their soothing and reassuring words, soon produced their desired effects; and the exhausted patient lay for some time in comparative tranquility. After a prolonged stillness, Mrs. Lafitte once more spoke to her daughter. "You are a Christian, Elise; you must make up your mind to submit yourself to the will of God and help me to prepare myself for this last, long voyage. Do not weep, do not grieve for me, my dear daughter. Shall we not meet again in a better world? I wish to receive the Sacraments, that I may be strengthened in my passage through the dark valley—that our Saviour himself may lead me, and restore me to my beloved."

A week passed. To Lucile and her mother it was one clogged with tears and loneliness of heart. The precious life they strove to retain, flickered away like a fire left without fuel. Day by day, they saw her strength declining and her life ebbing away slowly and painlessly. There was in her eyes a look of longing and eager expectancy, like that of one watching for the hour of her deliverance. One evening Mrs. Hunt and Lucile stood near her with anxious and affectionate solicitude depicted in their weeping eyes. The pallid countenance of the dying one was lit up with a supernatural light which filled them with awe. Suddenly, she stretched her feeble hands towards them: "Elise—Lucile—my children—help me!" she faintly cried; "help me to cross the cold water—stay with me until I pass over—I see him beckoning on the shore beyond!"

Mrs. Hunt lifted her dying parent from her pillow, and laid her head upon her own throbbing bosom. "Do not fear, mother; I shall not leave you; my loving arms are around you; I shall hold you until you reach the shore."

It was a calm, beautiful afternoon in February. A blue, subtle haze hung over the earth like a veil, and the rays of the

setting sun filtered through the opalescent air, darting downwards their golden shafts as if pointing to bewildered souls, the shining way to the throne of God. The pure spirit of *grandmère*, perchance, had fallen into one of these streaming paths, for the casket of her white soul lay cold and still in her deserted home.

Once again the black hearse with its trappings of woe, passed through the wide gates between the antled horns. At the sight of the lugubrious vehicle destined to carry away the remains of their beloved old mistress, the negroes congregated about the yard and gallery, raised their voices in despairing cries and lamentations. In those days, when a kind master died, his slaves were filled with consternation; for the very indulgence which lightened their burdens and mitigated the trials of their condition, served to accentuate their sufferings in a more distressful and hopeless servitude. The estate, in passing into other hands, generally necessitated the sale of this living chattel, and consequently, was followed by heart-rendering scenes, and by separations more cruel than death. Although the Lafitte negroes knew that their young mistress, Mrs. Hunt, was the sole heir to the estate, and that her husband was considered one of the most lenient masters of the parish, yet the fear of being sold or put under the management of a harsh overseer, filled them with dismay. Thus they wept and moaned and bewailed their wretched lot, until Mr. Hunt appeased their fears by kind assurance, and the promise of protection against cruel drivers.

This touching scene was enacted after the 1st of January, 1863. The day which proclaimed their freedom, had already dawned upon them, and the shackles of thralldom had fallen from their feet. They, and thousands of their race in bondage, though ignorant of the blessed fact, owned no master save

One, by whose inscrutable means their deliverance had been accomplished. Still, these loving, faithful creatures followed in humble distress, the remains of the last human being that was destined to exercise authority over their lives and fortunes.

Departing winter, sprinkled once with snow the brown fields and unsightly stubbles, leaving its thrice melancholy record to the sad hearts at Highland. When May burst upon the world, with all the luxuriance of its sweet gifts of birds and flowers, and the soft blades of bermuda, once more waved over forgotten graves at St. Francis, the work of loving hands expanded into beauty within the railings of the Lafitte lot. Blue-eyed violets sprawled beneath their verdant canopies, and slyly peeped at their new and peaceful surroundings.

The lilac, once sacred to the dead, offered to every passing bee its dripping chalices, and an old cabbage rose-bush, once the pride of *grandmère's* garden, here unfolded its rose-tinted petals, and distilled its fragrance over her lowly grave. On the booming river near by, the ominous throb of engines on the enemy's war-boats, awakened dull echoes along the shores; but the low cooing of sorrowing pigeons and plaintive murmurings of the pines, were the only sounds heeded in the silent city, where *grandpère* and *grandmère* awaited together the Angel's summons to arise from imprisoned dust for the glorious reunion of immortal soul and body.

CHAPTER XVII.

BENEATH THE LIGHT OF THE STARS.

AT this period of the war, Dr. Gilbert, an Episcopalian minister, with the assistance of his efficient wife, opened a school at the mouth of Bayou Fordoche, eight miles from the Hunt place. As it was the only school in that part of the country, it was opened to both sexes, and was liberally patronized by people of every class and denomination. Lucile, Herbert Davis and Nannie Dawsey entered as boarders, returning home on Fridays, after the dismissal of their classes. One evening in June, Nannie accompanied Lucile home to spend the night. The family lingered until a late hour out on the gallery, where the odor of flowers blended with the breeze, and where they had a glimpse of a young moon gilding the tree tops. Lucile retired to her room with the intention of working on a sum in algebra she was trying to solve without the assistance of her teacher. Notwithstanding her tireless energy, she at length discovered her inability to grasp the problem, and she reluctantly laid her book aside and seated herself at the open window. Fixing her earnest gaze on the heavens, she contemplated the soft radiance of the summer constellations silently reeling through trackless space. Memory reverted to those pleasant school days so abruptly terminated by the war. She recalled the happy evenings at the convent, when her teacher led her delighted pupils out into the balmy night air to "star-gaze." How vivid were the recollections of the circumstances under which each brilliant cortège had been traced out and studied! Her eyes ran along the starry vault until arrested by the strik-

ing brilliancy of Arcturus, surpassing in splendor the other stars scattered in its neighborhood. She gazed with increasing awe on that luminary, the Almighty once singled out by name among the imperial hosts of heaven. When Bootes, the constellation which contains this remarkable star, was first mapped out by her class, it was she who had been called upon to recite Young's paraphrase on that beautiful passage in Job, alluding to it, and she now repeated it to herself, slowly and solemnly as she would a prayer, meditating on each line as if endeavoring to impress upon her soul the depth and beauty of the conception.

"Well! there you are at it again!" exclaimed Nannie Dawsey, walking up to the window. "You found it easier to count the stars than to cipher, didn't you?"

"I've never had the ambition to count them, Nan, but I have often tried to form an idea of their distance from us; the effort is simply stunning!"

"That's sheer nonsense, Lucile. God never intended for us to meddle with his heavenly bodies. I think it's sinful."

"In all ages, good and wise men have been studying and investigating the heavens. God never condemned them for trying to learn all they could."

"Much they know about it!" replied Nannie, with a contemptuous toss of her head, "and I'm sure He thanks no one for rumaging the skies the way they are doing nowadays."

"God does not object to it, Nannie, for ancient historians say, that at the beginning of the world, people naturally fell into the habit of studying the heavens, because the knowledge was of great importance to mankind, and He prolonged their lives that they might have time to make advancements in the study of astronomy."

"Much they know of God's ideas on the subject!" suggested Nannie, rapping her fingers on the window sill.

"But they were sure that he had no objections to their studying astronomy, for there's a book in the Bible in which He mentions the names of the stars when He speaks to Job: "Canst thou," He asks, "bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season, or guide Arcturus with his sons?"

"Well!" put in Nannie, "there's neither head or tail in that rigmarol to prove that I'm wrong."

"I quoted that passage to show you that God did not disdain to make use of the names men gave to the stars." "He would not have done so, had He disapproved of the study of astronomy. On the contrary, I think He sanctions it; for it elevates the soul, and teaches us the greatness of God."

"That's all very well for notional people, Lucile; I, for one, have not the least inclination for 'soul-elevating' studies—unless they be of the matter-of-fact kind, like the trade I have just been learning from Plaisance, for instance."

"What was that, pray?" asked Lucile.

"Whilst you were sitting here *star-gazing*, I was in the dining-room learning how to sole shoes;" said Nannie, laughing merrily. "Don't you think that was a more sensible occupation than yours?"

"In some respects—yes; most people have to sole their own gaiters nowadays. I have Plaisance to do that work for me; consequently, I am at liberty to indulge in more congenial occupations, you see."

"I'm not such an ignoramus as you think," retorted Nannie, glancing at the glowing skies, "I'm a sort of astromomer myself; for I can make out several kinds of figures among the stars. I know where the North star is (when I'm at home),

and the seven sisters, and the flat-iron. I can't see it now," continued she, craning her neck out of the window, "but there is a certain time in the year that I can trace out a *number one* kite, tail and all. I generally find it somewhere near the North star. I wish you could see it, Lucile; it's a perfect kite, sort of a square diamond shape, its tail flying out this way;" she explained, with a wave of her hand.

"O I know what you mean now, Nannie; you are describing the chair of Cassiopea. It will not be visible before August, I mean, at this time of the night, but if you look for it after midnight, you will surely see it above those trees."

"Thank you; after I go to bed, no amount of stars will coax me out before morning. But what do you think of my observations?"

"The figure of a chair does bear some resemblance to a kite, Nannie. Your idea is original; astronomers call it our inverted chair."

"I should like to know which of the gods kicked it over. Tell me about it Lucile."

"If you care to learn something about Cassiopea and her chair, you are welcome to my astronomy. I shall show you the chapter and you can find out for yourself. But whilst we are on the subject, let me tell you of a wonderful phenomenon which occurred in this constellation many centuries ago. In a certain spot within it, there appeared a beautiful star never seen before, and surpassing in size and brilliancy any of the planets. During a period of sixteen months, this unknown visitant underwent the most extraordinary changes, similar in effect to tremendous conflagrations. Its color at first was of a dazzling white; but it eventually changed to a reddish yellow, the color of fire. After that it grew paler and paler, until it was entirely blotted out from the heavens. Astronomers were

watching this interesting occurrence, and forming all kinds of conjectures about it. They imagined that after a certain number of years, it would return; but it never did. Then, they concluded that it was a world that had been burnt up. Think of that, Nannie, a world perhaps bigger than ours, being destroyed by fire! Could you imagine a grander and more appalling sight?"

"I reckon I could; the burning up of a pile of cotton bales!" answered the girl, with a mien so serious and self-convincing, that Lucile appeared for a second confounded by the unexpected and ridiculous comparison. Before she could recover from her surprise, Nannie, with the utmost nonchalance, asked:

"Did your Pa attend the meeting of the Cotton-Burners at Livonia, Lucile?"

"He did."

"And was it decided to destroy cotton?"

"No; papa convinced them of the folly of the unnecessary sacrifice."

"When the Yankees get hold of our cotton, we will be wonderfully benefitted by it;" remarked Nannie, with a sneer on her red lips.

"Its the planters' business to keep their cotton out of the enemy's way," said Lucile, calmly. "Papa intends to have his hauled to Chalpa Swamp."

"What good? the niggers will tell on him!"

"I think not; they seem as anxious as papa, to get it out of danger."

"You are all mighty trustful! Those niggers are going to turn tables on you, first chance they get. See if they don't."

"The negroes on this place, I'm certain, will have no desire to perform that feat, Nan."

Here, the conversation was interrupted by a detonation so loud and a concussion so violent, that the sashes rattled in their frames.

“Goodness, gracious me!” exclaimed Nannie, “wasn’t that a stunner? Those Yankee gunboats are trying again to slip by Port Hudson. General Gardner is sending them unusually big compliments, don’t you think?”

Both girls turned in the direction where a slender arc flashed athwart the dusky void. Then, meteor after meteor, like rockets on a festive night, leaped across the distant horizon. The noise of cannons, like muffled thunder, incessantly struck the recoiling atmosphere. These were familiar sounds and sights to the two girls, and they sat for some time silently watching this terribly fascinating pageantry of war, displayed beneath the holy light of the stars.

“Wouldn’t I enjoy the fun they are having over there?” exclaimed Nannie; “*I do wish* I was a man. You wouldn’t catch me shirking as some do, who ought to be fighting this very minute.”

“Whom do you mean, Nannie?”

“Well, I won’t mention names.”

“Do you allude to Papa?” asked Lucile in a somewhat shaky voice.

“I never said *who*?” replied her friend, her eyes still fixed on the curving lights in the direction of Port Hudson.

“If you do,” said Lucile with rising color, “you are laboring under a greivous mistake. Papa has not joined the Confederate army, because he is a Union man. He voted against the war; he opposed it all he could, and he has never changed his views, nor will he act contrary to his principles.”

“I must say that he has fine ideas for a Southern man!”

“This is a free country,” replied Lucile, in a sort of des-

perate way. "Every man has a right to his own opinion; but it happens it is not every one who dares to express them as openly as papa does. You must, at least, give him credit for his frankness. He has no ill feelings towards the Secessionists, because he knows they are honest at heart; and he gives them as much assistance as though his sympathies were with them."

"That's true," answered Nannie, reflectively; "he is noted for his generosity to our soldiers. I heard Captain Cuttler say that your Pa was the most open-handed planter on Grosse Tete. Whenever he was in need of supplies, he knew exactly where to go, and he got them without hearing complaints. And the boys say when they are hard up for a meal, they ride up to the Highland where they are served to the best of everything. But Lucile, you are too quick to jump at conclusions. I wasn't thinking about your Pa when I referred to certain men who were shirking and loafing around, instead of going off to fight for their country. I meant Jim Higgins and Mr. Logan, who pretended to be such red-hot Confederates when the war broke out; and there's your dear friend and sweetheart, Herbert Davis, idling his time at school instead of going off to the army."

Once again Lucile's cheeks were flooded with crimson.

"Nannie Dawsey! How dare you insinuate such things? Herbert is *not* my sweetheart, we are both too young to think of love. He is trying to get an education whilst he has a chance, and has never tried to evade his duty. He begged his father for permission to join Captain R's company; Mr. Davis positively refused his consent, and will not give it until Herbert is seventeen. He is waiting impatiently for the time to enlist. And as to his loafing around! You are the first one to underate his character, Nannie. Everybody knows that he is a steady, industrious boy, and the hardest student at our school."

"That will do Lucile, you needn't say another word in Herbert's defense; according to your idear, he's just perfect. But I know a thing or two; among others is this: If I was a man and wanted to fight, no Pa of mine could keep me out of the army. The ones who contrive to keep out of it are afraid of Yankee bullets; that's the long and short of it."

Lucile made no response to her friend's emphatic expression of her views, but continued to watch the magnificent displays in the heavens.

Nannie began drumming on the casement in accompaniment to her song which floated out in the night air, in clear, melodious notes.

"Then let the big guns roar as they will,
We will be gay and happy still.
Gay and happy, free and easy,
Louisiana is our home!"

Early the next morning the girls took a walk in the flower garden; the weather was warm and sultry, and the grass sparkled with dew. But the two threaded their way among the dripping shrubbery, clipping floral beauties which Lucile carried in a basket hung on her arm. One could not imagine a more lovely picture than these two girls, gliding in and out of shadow and sunshine like a pair of butterflies in search of the sweetest flowers. The color of Nannie's cheeks was that of a damask rose, and her pretty brown hair rippled all over her neck and shoulders. Lucile, at fifteen, still had the appearance of a child, but she was as graceful as a fawn in her movements. She had an exquisite complexion, and the fringed lashes of her dark blue eyes contributed to heighten the beauty of her expressive countenance. She wore a broad-brimmed palmetto hat her mother had made for her. The trimming consisted of an elaborately braided palmetto band,

into which Nannie had just inserted a cluster of white roses. The girls had now found a bed of blooming mignonnette, and they both began clipping the cymes of the odoriferous plants.

"Rosanna is a fond lover of mignonnette," remarked Lucile; "I must lay aside the loveliest for her."

"You're mighty sweet on your future sister-in-law, Lucile;" observed her mischievous friend.

"Nannie, what's gotten into you?" cried Lucile, dropping her shears. "Its *very* unkind of you to make such remarks!"

"I'm not the only one to make them, my dear, the whole school knows that Herbert is dead in love with you, and don't find it so dreadfully wicked either. You're a very sweet and interesting couple, I think."

"Herbert is *not* in love with me" answered Lucile, recklessly mowing down the mignonnette; this is merely an invention of yours!"

"Upon my word 'tis not, Lucile; why it's fun for us to watch Herbert's eyes when the senior class is called in for recitation. First thing he does on reaching the door is to hunt you up; and when he does catch a glimpse of you, his face lights up like sunshine after rain."

"That's Herbert's natural expression, Nannie, he always looks cheerful."

"Hold on, 'till I tell you something else. Last Thursday, Dr. Gilbert called in the class before you came from practicing. Herbert walked in with a face like a bran new dollar. As usual, his eyes ran around the room in search of some one whom he did not find, of *course*; and his countenance fell as flat as a pan-cake—I declare it did!"

"Well—I don't deny Herbert's friendship for me—we have always liked each other; his tastes are very similar to mine, and this makes us congenial. He loves to talk to me

about his studies and brings me books to read, but he has never told me that he cared for me."

"Good morning, young ladies!"

"Bless me!" exclaimed Nannie, rising from her knees, "talk about angels and they walk right in."

Herbert had ridden to the gate, evidently with the intention of calling, but the sight of Nannie disconcerted him. They were not the best of friends; whenever they met they were continually sparring at each other. Herbert did not feel inclined to renew the strife which characterized their usual intercourse at school.

"Here's a *boutonnière* for you, pray dismount, captain;" cried Nannie, holding up a tiny bouquet.

But the lad made no response; he sat in his saddle, gracefully erect, a look of disappointment plainly depicted in his handsome, open countenance.

"Speak to him Lucile," said Nannie, in a jesting tone; "don't you see he is mad because it wasn't you who offered him the flowers."

"Won't you come in Herbert?" asked Lucile, in a timid, hesitating voice.

He courteously lifted his hat. "Thank you. I have an engagement down the road." Suddenly, a bright idea flashed across his mind. "Are you going home this morning, Nannie?"

"That's a polite question," answered she, smiling sarcastically. "Why do you want to know?"

"Because if you are, I shall offer to escort you. I heard that the Yankees were raiding out on False River, and may, at any moment, venture out here, and I don't think it's prudent for you to walk home alone."

"You are very considerate; wait a minute; I shall go with you, Herbert."

As the two girls stepped upon the gallery, Nannie whispered: "Why Lucile, you are already green with jealousy!"

Lucile gave Nannie an appealing look and followed her into her bed-room.

The latter placed herself before the glass and coquettishly tucked a red rose in her rippling hair. "Am I not too sweet for anything?" she asked, casting glances of admiration at her own bright image. "My dear Lucile, I mean to make a dead set for Herbert's heart, that is, if you have no serious objections?"

"The very idea!" and Lucile turned aside to hide the blush which overspread her face. "If your ambition prompts you to make a conquest of Herbert's affections, I'm the last person in the world to interfere with you."

"My ambition!" retorted Nannie, curling her crimson lips. "Gracious me! then you consider him better than other people?"

"Better than most boys," responded Lucile, somewhat defiantly. "He is sincere and noble and good, and——"

"Hold on!" interrupted her companion, snatching up her satchel. "I'm not love-blinded. I know all about his perfections and imperfections too, as far as his character is concerned; good bye!"

Planting a kiss on Lucile's quivering lips, she continued: "Don't forget to bring your share of the Confederate cake, and a jar of pickles. You know we had short rations last week!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED CALL AND REVELATION.

HERBERT'S engagement down the road did not detain him long. On his way back he once more turned his horse's head in the direction of the elegant home among the oaks. A dozen horses were tethered to the front fence; he knew that they belonged to a squad of Confederate soldiers he had seen galloping by. He had just passed their picket guard a quarter of a mile off. He led his own steed around to the stable yard and returned to the house. Zulma answered his impatient knock at the hall door.

"Oh, dat's you, Mars 'Erbert!" she exclaimed, with a dubious grin. "I was dun skeered!"

"Are you afraid of people in broad day-light now, Zulma?"

"Dese is skeeful times, mind you," she answered, wiping with her apron her greasy lips, "an' I went an' tuck vou for a Yankee."

"That's a compliment! Do I look like one?"

"Dat was befo' I seed you," she answered, opening the parlor door. "We yere dey's a prowln' 'round False River; no tellin w'en dey'll bounce right in. When dey does, I 'spec we'se gwine to have a fight in dis yere very house. Dinin' room full uv rebs, eatin' breakfuss."

"Don't let that trouble you, Zulma; they'll have it outside. Where's your mistress?"

"In de dinin' room, porin' out coffee—if dey *does* have it outside," proceeded the girl, her mind reverting to the threatened danger, "*some* one gwine to git hurt, sho'."

"That one wont be you—I can vouch for it," replied Herbert, somewhat impatiently. "Call in your little mistress. I have something important to tell her, and I am in a great hurry."

"Can't see'er neider, Mars 'Erbert; she's in de kitchen 'elpin' Aunt Polly fry batter-cakes fur de sojers "

"Confound it! can't you replace her for a few minutes, Zulma?"

"I's busy myself, chippin' dry beef fur de rebs; dey's in a bigger hurry den you is," answered the slave, tripping off with a mischievous twinkle in her black eyes.

"Hold on, Zulma," cried Herbert in desperation, "I *must* see Lucile; tell her that I am here waiting to see her."

"Fate seems to be against me, I can never have a chance to speak to her," he murmured to himself, pacing the parlor floor with apparent agitation. His dark hazel eyes, usually bright with boyish animation, now revealed the disturbances of his soul. He was evidently laboring under some mental strain, and anticipated the doubtful results of an approaching ordeal.

At length he seated himself near the centre table and began turning the leaves of a book of poems. Some passage in the volume seemed to arrest his attention, for he read with apparent interest for a few seconds; then taking from his pocket a note book, he wrote within it a few hurried lines. On the table was a vase filled with fresh flowers; he broke off from among them a rosebud and folded it in a leaf torn from the blank book. At this moment Lucile stepped into the room. Her cheeks were unusually flushed, and her eyes met his with

unwonted timidity, but she greeted him with a pleasant smile. "You will excuse me, Herbert, for having kept you waiting," she said; "I was helping mamma serve breakfast to some of our soldiers, who are going out to the river on urgent business."

"You are excusable, Lucile," answered Herbert, with a grave smile; you were not aware that *my* business was as urgent as theirs."

Lucile looked up into his face with an incredulous stare. "No, I was not; what is it, Herbert?"

"If you sit here, I shall explain."

He took a seat on the sofa, she on the piano stool.

"Don't perch up there, so far from me, Lucile," he pleaded; "I have a secret to tell you, and don't particularly care to publish it on the house-top."

A laugh, nervous but musical, broke from the girl's beautifully curved lips. "Oh, it's to be a secret then," she exclaimed, walking across the room to the seat beside him. His fine, magnetic eyes, looked into hers with a world of meaning in their clear, searching depths; Lucile's dropped with girlish modesty. Nannie's observations, touching his devotions to her had disquieted her soul; she could no longer meet his glance with the frankness of former days.

"I see so little of you now, dear Lucile," he said, "that you must really pardon me for gazing at you when the opportunity offers itself."

"Do you not see me every day at school?"

"Yes, in the recitation room, where a lot of mischievous girls are ever on the alert, ready to talk and criticise. Of late, I have kept aloof from you, lest they should estrange you from me with some of their foolish tattle."

A lovely blush overspread Lucile's cheeks; she arose from her seat and walked to a stand in the corner of the room, bringing back a small basket filled with balls of spun cotton. "Herbert, you will not mind if I plat these candle wicks, will you?"

"Are the candles in a particular hurry for their wicks?" asked Herbert, with a look of annoyance overshadowing his handsome face.

"I can't answer for the candles," responded his companion, laughing, "but I know that Plaisance is anxious to dip these this evening; we have only two confederate candles left, and these, you know, are only fit for the kitchen."

Lucile unwound a portion of the twist and began cutting it into requisite lengths.

Herbert watched her in silence.

"You promised to tell me a secret," she ventured to say.

"Little you care to know it," he replied, in an aggrieved tone of voice. "There was a time you were always ready and willing to sympathize with me in my troubles. What has changed you, Lucile?"

"If the matter in any way concerns you, tell it to me. I am all attention."

"Well, in the first place, I must inform you that I am not going back to school."

"And why not?"—Lucile remembered Nannie's silly talk—"has some one said things to vex you?"

"As though I would allow such trifles to interfere with my studies! I once told you how anxious I was to go into the army, and how strenuously father opposed my wishes. He is still firm in his decision about keeping me at school until my seventeenth year. The idea is preposterous. I will have to wait six months longer; and I don't intend to do it. Our

president is asking for fresh troops and I think it is the duty of every Southern man to respond to the call. I, for one, will not withhold my services. I am old enough to perform the duties of a soldier; my pride is at stake, and I see no reason why I should be debarred from the honors and privileges others enjoy. All the young men of my age, if of any account, are in the army fighting for Southern Rights; and I mean to cast my lot with them. Now, Lucile, tell me truly, if you do not think my decision just and patriotic."

"I'm the last person in the world to advise, Herbert; why do you put me to such a task?"

"Because I would be perfectly miserable if I were to take a step which you condemned."

"Act according to the dictates of your conscience, Herbert; it will never reproach you. But, if you *do* care for my opinion, I shall give it honestly; do not leave home without your father's consent, if you can possibly help it. I don't think he will refuse it if you ask him in the right way. If you do this, you will be better satisfied with yourself, and better able to endure the hardships of war. And, besides, you will have God's blessing to sustain you, in case you meet with any misfortune."

"You are a wise and dear little counsellor," he said, looking down into the beautiful eyes raised to his with touching entreaty.

"Where do you intend going?" she asked, catching her breath, her heart was beating so rapidly.

"I am going with Captain R., to Milliken's bend, where Taylor has been ordered to co-operate with Pemberton. Unless immediate assistance be rendered, Vicksburg will surely fall. There will be hot fighting there I suppose.

Lucile's graceful form and head bent lower over her work; the soft, white twine fairly flew in and out of her agile fingers.

"I am not going away, Lucile, without sharing with you a secret I have kept locked up in my bosom for I know not how long—since I first met you, I do believe. You were such a dear lovely child!"

"O, nonsense, Herbert!"

"Well, from the time of our first acquaintance, there was a certain feeling that crept into my heart. It was one which strengthened with my growth, and took possession of my whole being as though it were part of myself. You never knew how deeply and tenderly I loved you, Lucile?"

"Herbert, you shock me!" cried the girl, burying her face in her hands. "You have no right to tell me this; what will papa think of you?"

"Your father cannot very well censure me for doing exactly what he did some twenty years ago. Did he not have to let your mother know of his love, in order to win hers?"

"But you must not tell it to me now, Herbert; I'm too young; you must stop it!"

"Indeed, I wont," replied the youth, with almost sullen persistency. "I did not mean to tell you all this so soon, Lucile; but circumstances force me to speak, and you *must* listen to me. I am going away; I may not see you again for years. In the meantime you will have reached an age when women receive the homage of men. You will be beautiful; someone will try and rob me of my treasure. The thought makes me *wretched*. I have been trying during all these years, to make myself worthy of you, hoping some day to win your love. You are the idol of my heart; I care for none on earth as I do for you. Oh, Lucile! do not let me go without a word of love

or of encouragement! Promise that you will not permit any of the boys to make love to you during my absence."

"Lucile half turned her rosy face; "That's not a very hard promise to give, Herbert," she said, with a smile rippling all over her countenance.

"But, Lucile, you will not allow it because of your love for me; not from a lack of coquetry; tell me that, dearest."

"You have no right to put such a question to me, and I will not answer you."

"But I *have*," exclaimed the lad with vehemence, "unless you deny it, I shall take the affirmative for an answer. I know you are too truthful to deceive me."

There was a moment's silence.

"Then I shall consider this a sacred compact between us," pursued Herbert, lowering his handsome face over her bowed head. "You must understand that I have given you my heart's affection, without reserve. Some day I shall claim yours in return."

He took from his pocket a tiny parcel. "Here's a little token I wish to leave with you; only a rosebud and a few significant lines; they will remind you of me, dear little sweet-heart, if you are ever tempted to forget."

"I shall not forget you, Herbert."

"I hardly think you could," he said, pressing into her hand the little souvenir. "Now, I want a favor in return; give me the rose you are wearing, please."

She raised her graceful head from the basket and, with fluttering fingers, began detaching the desired object from the pin which held it.

"You really do not care for this," she said, holding it before her with a sweet, pathetic, smile. "It is withered and worthless, Herbert."

“But it will be most precious to me, nevertheless,” he answered, taking from her the drooping flower which had been crushed beneath her white throat. But, alas! at his touch, the fragile petals fell in a shower at his feet. A look of chagrin, like a cloud, swept across his countenance. “I am unfortunate!” he exclaimed, casting a deprecating glance at Lucile.

“O, that’s nothing, Herbert,” she said in a reassuring manner. “There are plenty more in the parterre.”

“But this is the only one I care to have,” answered Herbert, placing the depleted corolla and stem between the leaves of his pocket-book. “I am going now, Lucile; to-morrow I shall come to bid you good-bye.”

Every vistage of color fled from the girl’s cheeks. She stood before him clasping and unclasping her hands, her lips all in a quiver. “Herbert, I shall have to tell mamma all that has passed between us.”

“I have not the least objection,” replied the young lover. “I think it is right that you should. It is not my intention to forfeit your parent’s esteem by hiding from them my feelings towards you. *Au revoir*, then, my dear Lucile.”

For some time after Herbert’s departure, Lucile stood like one in a dream. A strange, new feeling pervaded her whole being. It was love’s awakening influences, but she knew it not. A sweet desolation filled her heart; she threw herself upon the sofa, in a childish outburst of grief.

CHAPTER XIX.

EPISODES ON ALL SAINTS' DAY.

THE festival fell on a Sunday, and Lucile felt a melancholy pleasure in spending it at home, for she knew how sadly her mother would have missed her had she been at school. One year ago, Lucile had passed a memorable week with the loved ones, now forever removed from life's endearing associations. It was Mrs. Hunt's intention to fulfil on this day the mournful duties she owed to her departed parents; to weep over their graves and to deck them with the tokens of her undying remembrance. But the Federals, who, since the fall of Port Hudson, had made this part of the parish their headquarters, were now bivouaced in the vicinity of Saint Francis' church. Naturally, their presence debarred the people from the performance of their accustomed ceremonies at the graveyard, and deprived them of the consolations which religion alone offered to the bereaved. The dead of the ancient cemetery, received no tribute from loving hands that year; there was a lack of garlands, of tears and prayers. But nature, as if in compensation, silently assumed the duties denied to the faithful. The flowers formerly brought here to decorate the tombs, had scattered the seeds which were now transformed into a gorgeous array of cock's combs and amaranths. Like freinds in adversity, they stood about the neglected graves where the wild asters clustered, and the adventurous golden-rod waved its flaming torches. Lucile and her mother had

devoted much of their time during the preceding summer to the cultivation of the flowers destined to decorate their cemetery lot. But the handsome chrysanthemums and dahlias which had expanded into beauty at the desired time, were left on the stalks to breast the dreary rains of autumn. In the bitterness of her disappointment, Mrs. Hunt decided upon a plan which would, in a manner, bring her in touch with the dear departed; and that was to visit her ancestral home.

After Mrs. Lafitte's death, the plantation had been put under the control of an overseer, who, according to Mr. Hunt's orders, was not to deviate from the old *régime* in his management. With childlike docility, the slaves resumed their accustomed work, apparently well contented with their lot. This state of affairs lasted until Bank's memorable invasion. The alluring promises made by the Union soldiers demoralized all the negroes in the country, and thousands of them fled from their homes to follow his army on its way to Port Hudson. Here, like dazzled moths, they settled around the glare of its camp fires, perishing by the score, and undergoing untold sufferings, brought on by famine and exposure. The Lafitte negroes were not proof against the allurements held forth by the Federals. One night they took unceremonious possession of their young master's mules and wagons, and stole away as noiselessly as Bedouins. This was no uncommon occurrence. At this period of the war, owners of slaves knew not the day, when on rising they should find deserted quarters and abandoned crops; and the ladies of the household were often called upon to renounce the hour's lounging in luxurious chambers, for the disagreeable duties of their absconded cooks. A few decrepid negroes, with feet too near the brink of the grave to care for earthly promises and pilgrimages, still remained at *Corne à Chevreuil*. Nothing had been removed from the house,

save the valuable property; The rest had been left in charge of a venerable couple, whose faithful services had long exempted them from all servile labors. Aunt Patsy had come from "Ole Virginy," a circumstance which greatly enhanced her qualities in the eyes of her new master, and procured her numberless favors and privileges. She and her husband occupied one of the end rooms of the dreary old house. They were liberally compensated for airing the apartments and attending to the immediate surroundings. These two, and the few others who had refused to "fly into the face of Freedom" as Aunt Patsy expressed it, were the remnants of that stalwart force, representing fifty thousand dollars of the estate.

It is left to the reader's mind to form some conception of the emotions which stirred in the bosom of both mother and daughter, on reaching the forsaken place. Dave, as of old, stood at the carriage door, hat in hand, humbly awaiting to assist them to alight. But his mistress, oblivious of his presence, gazed with tearful eyes on the familiar objects about her. The sight was depressing and overpowered her with a sense of its utter desolation and forlornness.

"Life and thought had gone away side by side."

Lucile too, missed the accustomed smile which had ever before greeted her coming, and it was with effort that she suppressed the cry of "*grandmère!*" which rose unbidden to her lips.

They found Aunt Patsy in the garden weeding a bed of cabbage; when she recognized the visitors, she dropped her hoe and hobbled across the beds to meet them. But the weight of four score years, bore heavily down upon the weary limbs, and she made but slow progress, even in her eagerness to welcome her gentle mistress.

"I 'clar, Miss 'Lise," she cried, losing and catching her breath in her eagerness to reach her. "I 'clar, you did 'sprise

me drea'ful, but I'se awful glad ter see you, any'ow. I kep on sen'ing you word fur to cum an' look arter yo' things, an' you niver 'ow cum?"

"I received your message, Aunt Patsy," replied her mistress, "and I appreciated your efforts in trying to save our property, but really, my presence here would have done no good, and you know how painful 'tis for me to come; every thing is so different from what it used to be."

Here, emotion choked her utterance and the tears rushed to her eyes.

"Dey's no use in frettin', honey," said the faithful old creature, stroking the white hand which lay passively in hers. "You'd better be tankful ter de Lawd dat He tuck 'em ter glory befo' dey laid eyes on dese yere times of tribilations and distruction. Dey was tuck in de right time, chile, and de good Lawd dun put 'em whar no Yankees can't nebber trouble 'em. Gracious knows dey's doing dey bes' to 'stroy dis yere place! Cum erlong and see fur yo'self;" pursued Aunt Patsy, leading her mistress into the garden. "Look! dars my mustard bed all tromp under by dem Yankee sojers; an' dar's my ole man's inyun plants all spiled. Ef yo' look over yonder, Miss 'Lise, you won't find a single oringe on ole missis' trees; dem rogues knock off de very las' one of 'em, green as dey was. I jawed at 'em an' 'lowed I was gwine to 'port 'em to Lincom, an' you wanter b'leeve, one of dem fellers p'inted his pistol at me and tole me he had a great notion of sen'ing me ter h—ll? But I skeered 'em off, artar a while, an' dey ain't cum back sense. In my born days, I nebber seed sicher time! Dar's all de cane stan'in' in de feel, an' de 'taters in de groun'! Stidder dem niggers stayin' yere ter take off de crop, dey's all clared out 'cept dem's dat staid; an' dey ain't a bit account. As I was tellin' you, Miss 'Lise, dem Federals, dey tuck artar de

ducks and chickens, racin' roun' de yard, *jiss awful*. I was lookin' on thinkin' ter myself, 'spose ole marstar see dat, now; he'd turn obber in his grave! An' w'en dem sojers cum in yere, prancin' oher dese yere flowers an' vilets, I say to myself, says I, I hope to gracious ole missis aint got an eye on dem fellers!"

At this juncture, Lucile, who had been silently plucking the flowers from a sweet-olive tree, broke into a fit of ungovernable laughter. The combination of pathetic and ludicrous ideas which Aunt Patsy so impetuously rolled off her voluble tongue, conflicted and clashed with each other, in some undercurrent of the girl's mind, and the result was the painful and untimely outburst of hilarity. Poor Lucile, filled with dismay, looked towards her mother for the expected rebuke, but none came. Frightened and disconsolate, she then fell in the opposite extreme; she threw herself at the foot of the tree and gave vent to her feelings in a flood of tears.

Mrs. Hunt readily appreciated her daughter's predicament, and with a heart full of loving sympathy, laid her hand on her arm, saying: "Come darling, it is not good for either of us to remain here; our visits only tend to reopen the old wounds and make us unhappy."

Aunt Patsy, whose loquacity had been temporarily subdued by Lucile's unexpected behavior, stood by, with a long visage, ejaculating: "*Chillun is chillun, dey's nuffin' under de sun, solum 'nough fur 'em!*"

Lucile glanced at her mother, with that knowing and indescribable expression in her eyes, which perfectly conveyed her meaning. Humor on the verge of her lips, threatened to betray the conceits of her naturally speculative mind, and her mother once more came to her relief. "Get me the shears, Aunt Patsy," she said. "I want to take home some of these

flowers." During the servant's absence, Lucile recovered the serenity of her mind. When they were about to leave, Mrs. Hunt dropped a silver coin into the hands which clung so lovingly to hers. "Dear Aunt Patsy," she said, "don't worry about the place; the war will come to an end, some day, you know, and every thing will be all right again."

"Dey better stop dis yere fightin', Miss 'Lise, fur de place's gwine down fas' as it kin, notfurstanding all me an' my ole man does ter keep it a goin'!"

According to Aunt Patsey's opinion, the United States was waging war for the sole purpose and intent of breaking up the old plantation, and she resented the affront with all the vindictiveness born of her undying devotion to her young master and mistress.

After Lucile and her mother had given a parting glance to the bright blue waters of False River, they settled themselves for a silent and contemplative ride. At first there was little to interest them; the season had been unusually dry, and vegetation along the roadside, had been checked by the drought and dust. On some of the deserted sugar plantations, the ripe cane stood in thick ranks, drearily rustling its leaves in the rising wind. But the travelers loved the woods; the vine tressed trees and weeping mosses, never lost their attractions. As they passed, scarlet and golden leaves drifted gently downwards, tapping mournful farewells on their journey to the grave. The sunlight pouring into woodland vistas, contrasted weirdly with the purple shadows beyond, where the crows were holding noisy discourse with the obsinate jays. A white crane plumed itself on the summit of an old cypress tree. It reminded Lucile of a picture she had drawn when she was quite a child. They left the pleasant woods for the open country. They passed rich cotton-fields where

the staple hung snowy-white from its bronze-colored calyxes. This was a dollar a pound cotton, and yet it was left there at the mercy of the elements.

It was high noon and the carriage was about merging on the banks of Grosse Tete, when a squad of Confederate soldiers dashed into the lane, a few yards ahead of it. They were led by Lieutenant W., an intimate friend of the Hunts.

The little party drew rein, and the officer lifted his hat in salutation.

"Excuse my inquisitiveness, Mrs. Hunt," he said; "but really, I am curious to know how far out you have ridden."

"We are just from False River, Lieutenant."

"Indeed! and had an encounter with the Federals, I suppose?"

"I am glad to say, we were spared that honor," answered Mrs. Hunt, smiling. "Why do you ask?"

"Because it is reported that the Essex landed several regiments somewhere in the vicinity of the church, and they are to be sent out here on a foraging raid. We are now on our way to ascertain the truth of this rumor."

"Do you mean to oppose them with that handful of men?" asked Mrs. Hunt with evident concern.

"Hardly; we are only going to reconnoitre. We may have a little skirmish by way of diversion. But it is strange you heard nothing of the enemy's movement out there, Mrs. Hunt."

"I saw no one who could give information, Lieutenant; the housekeeper at the plantation certainly knew nothing of it, or else she would have put us on our guard."

While Lieutenant W. and Mrs. Hunt were thus talking, four of the steeds strayed off with their riders and began cropping the grass in the corners of the rail-fences. In the mean-

time, one of their number had ridden up to the carriage window where Lucile sat.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Lucile;" he said, lifting his cap from his brown curls. A lovely flush overspread the girl's soft cheeks, and she glanced shyly at Herbert, from under the curtain of her dark lashes. His eyes bent on her with a look full of devotional homage.

"Lucile," he said, in a low voice, "I have a message for you."

"From whom, Herbert?"

"From Miss Gresham; she commissioned me to deliver it before Tuesday, if possible."

"Well;" answered Lucile, with evident interest.

"She wishes you and your mother to attend her birthday celebration on the fifth."

"Impossible, Herbert; we are in mourning."

"But," interposed Herbert, in a disappointed tone of voice, "she begged me to explain that this is to be a private affair; only a supper given to a few friends—and—and a little singing, of course."

"Who are invited?" asked Lucile.

"Why, the Westons, the Tracys, Captain R.'s boys, myself included." There was a moment's silence. "*Do come* Lucile!" he asked in a pleading voice. "I request this as a favor."

The roses disappeared beneath the lilies of her faultless face; she raised her expressive eyes to his: "For mamma's sake, I ask you not to insist, Herbert!"

Here, the commanding officer doffed his hat to the fair occupants of the carriage; in an instant, he and his gallant followers had disappeared, wrapt in a whirl of dust.

That evening the sun sank into a chaotic mass of black clouds, which rapidly overspread the heavens and entirely blotted out the twilight. A Chimirean darkness was accompanied by a cold, dreary rain which began to beat upon the house roof and foliage like a Protean flock, scampering across the sands. The day had been an eventful one at the Highlands. The hands on the place had worked zealously till night-fall, removing from two-fold danger, a lot of cotton to the sawmill in Chalpa Swamp. From time to time, squads of Confederate soldiers rode by, apparently in an excited state of mind. No wonder, for about four o'clock that evening, a strong Federal force had began raiding around, driving off cattle, and committing all sorts of depredations. The few undisciplined Confederates scattered about the country, were in no condition to cope with these well organized veterans acting under command of experienced officers. Nevertheless, pride or a spirit of patriotism prompted our soldiers to make repeated attacks on the enemy. These bloodless assaults harrassed, but did not check the invaders, who continued to advance into the interior until they reached the mouth of the lane, where they began pitching their tents and lighting their camp-fires.

That night, Mr. Hunt sat up and read until the clear, musical strokes of the parlor clock, chimed the eleventh hour. The rain was still pelting the window shutters and the air had suddenly grown chilly. He arose with the intention of retiring, and was about taking up his candle, when his attention was arrested by a peculiar sound, like that of footsteps dragging heavily across the gallery floor. He immediately extinguished his light and sprang to the door to secure its fastenings. Besides the Yankee troops which were camped in the neighborhood, the country was, at that time, full of "jayhawkers" and

desperadoes; precautions against midnight intrusions were necessarily prudent. The unwelcome caller approached the parlor door, placed his lips in contact with the keyhole and spoke, but in a voice so muffled as not to be understood.

"Who are you, and what is your business?" demanded Mr. Hunt.

The answer came: "I am a Confederate soldier. I am wounded and almost frozen to death. For God's sake, Mr. Hunt, do not refuse me a night's lodging!"

"I will not admit you unless you prove that statement," replied Mr. Hunt, with firmness. "If you cannot do it, I advise you to leave the premises; for I am not going to be imposed upon."

"I took breakfast here this morning; the lady of the house spoke to me and ordered my horse to be fed. Ask her; surely, she remembers that."

"We are feeding the soldiers and their horses here, at all hours of the day, 'jayhawkers' included;" responded Mr. Hunt, in a calm, unyielding tone of voice.

The unknown leaned heavily against door, and groaned most pitioulsy.

At this moment, Mrs. Hunt laid a gentle hand upon her husband's arm. "O Arthur!" she softly whispered, "he is not deceiving us. He suffers; hear how pitifully he moans. Let him in!"

"It is not difficult for the scamp to feign suffering. Go to your room, Elise, I can manage him very well without you."

"He says he stopped here this morning; ask him what he had for breakfast and the subject of our conversation; his answers will surely remove your doubts. For the love of Heaven, give him a chance!"

The man gave ready and satisfactory answers to the questions put to him, and he was admitted without further deliberation. Mrs. Hunt recognized him at once, though she found it difficult to realize that the ragged, hatless, bloody and altogether forlorn creature who staggered into her presence, was in truth, the handsome and dashing young Texan, who had so favorably impressed her the day before.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PATHOS AND THE COMEDY OF WAR.

IMMEDIATELY after breakfast the next morning, Mrs. Hunt sought her chamber, where she knew Zulma was busy at her customary house-work. She found her standing at one of the open windows humming a war song. After carefully closing the door behind her, Mrs. Hunt walked up to the girl and asked, tentatively: "Were any of the soldiers out last night, Zulma?"

"Not dat I knows of," she replied, vigorously shaking the sheets; "I wuz jis' lookin' out dare fur ter see if dem Yankees ain't started rummagin'. I yeard day's a sight of 'em out in de lane."

"There is no telling what mischief they will do when they once begin," observed Mrs. Hunt, with a grave, preoccupied expression on her sweet face. There was a pause, during which her heart throbbed most violently. "I have something very important to tell you, Zulma," she resumed, in a confidential tone; "something which you must promise me never to divulge until I give you leave to." Zulma turned around with a look of amazement depicted on her open countenance. "Law, missis!" she exclaimed, "you dun clean upset me!"

"I didn't mean to," answered her mistress, smiling at the girl's conceit. "The secret I will tell you will not inconvenience you in the least. We've got into some trouble, and your

master and I have made up our minds to ask you to help us out of it. It is a very serious matter to us—one upon which depends the safety of our home and property."

"I'll run froo fire an' watter if you say so missis;" cried Zulma, with great warmth.

"Oh we won't ask such desperate proofs of your devotion! only your assistance and fidelity."

"You kin truss me," said the girl, tossing a sheet on the bed and leaning against one of the posts in a listening attitude.

"I shall have to explain everything from the very beginning, that you may clearly understand our position;" began Mrs. Hunt, with an expression which plainly revealed the workings of her anxious mind, and the struggles it cost her to pursue the course she was about to adopt. "Do you remember the soldier who breakfasted here yesterday morning?"

"I doz; he was a pert looking feller!"

"Well, he had come from a long distance—from the other side of Atchafalaya river. He was a courier carrying papers which he had to deliver at the risk of his life. He passed through the woods and fields on his return home, and did not know that the Yankees had overrun the country. Just before sundown yesterday evening, he got out on the road about three miles from here. He was riding on very slowly, in a kind of doze, for he was very tired and sleepy. Suddenly, he was startled by the report of rifles and the whizzing sound of bullets close to his ear."

"Great goodness! He run plum inter de Yankee pickets!" exclaimed Zulma.

"It must have been a scout, for a half a dozen men sprang from the thick bushes on the side of the road, and called on him to halt. He threw himself from his horse and plunged into the cane-brake, where he knew they would not attempt to

follow him. His enemies pursued him as far as they dared, shooting at him until he got out of their range. Though badly wounded, he managed to get out of the woods. He got here at about midnight, and begged us to let him in. When we did, we saw that he was in a terrible condition. He was drenched to the skin, and was so weak from loss of blood he could hardly drag himself along. We brought him upstairs and did all we could to make him comfortable. But his arm was so much inflamed that it gave him fever. He is now too ill to continue his journey, and we will have to keep him until he is able to travel again."

"I nebber seed you turn out a sick dog, missis," Zulma remarked, with an approving jesture: "sho' you ain't gwine ter treat dis yere poor Rebel wurser!"

"If the Yankees find out that we are harboring a Confederate soldier," continued Mrs. Hunt, "they will immediately surround the house and take him prisoner, and perhaps, will make us pay dearly for thus befriending him."

"If dey does, dey ain't got a bit of feeling lef', an' I'll tell 'em so ter dey faces;" cried Zulma, with rising indignation.

"Now Zulma," pursued her mistress, "I want you to help us nurse him, and keep the negroes on the place from finding out that he is in the house. Some of them may be tempted to betray us, and we have the best reason in the world for trying to save him and keep him from falling into the hands of the Yankees—he is my own dear cousin."

Zulma threw up her hands in astonishment. "Gracious goodness! You tole me you hadn't any kinfolks in de wurl 'cept marstar and li'l' mistis."

"I really thought so until last night; when I found out, to my surprise, that the wounded soldier is the son of one of my uncles who had left the parish years ago. We thought he had

died but he had gone to Texas, where he married and left a large family of children."

"Ain't you mighty proud of dese yere *bran new* relations, missis?" asked Zulma with a beaming smile.

"Indeed I am, Zulma, but the dangers which now surround him and threaten his life, make me very unhappy and spoil the pleasure of having him with us."

"You're skeerin' yo'self fur nuffin' missis; nobody gwine ter tell on you, an' no Yankee gwine ter lay hole of dis yere cousin of yourn. Ain't I yere ter stan' by you?"

True to her promise, Zulma became guardian spirit of the household for the time being. As long as the enemy hovered in the neighborhood, she kept watch and ward, while the family strove to quiet and soothe the patient, who, for many days, tossed with fever and racking pains, upon a delirious bed. It was she, who made surreptitious visits to the hen-house at night and throttled the chickens for his broth. It was she, who outwitted the Federals on her way to the drug-shop and smuggled in the doctor. These and numerous other services she rendered, proved how utterly impotent would have been the family's devotion to their new found relative, without the concurrence of the faithful Zulma.

A few hours after this interview, half a dozen Confederate scouts passed the Hunt place, just as one of the hands was about driving his wagon out of the stable-yard. They noticed that it was loaded with corn, on top of which lay the carcasses of three freshly slaughtered hogs.

"Where are you going with that load?" demanded one of the party, checking up his horse.

"Hanlin' it ter de camp out dare, cap'an;" responded André, humbly pulling off his tattered hat.

"You'll do no such thing, you infernal rascal!" cried the officer angrily. "Go right back!"

Mr. Hunt, who was standing at the crib door, started in the direction of the gate, and called out: "What's keeping you, Andre. Go on!"

"Not while I am here to prevent him, Mr. Hunt;" replied the Confederate, stationing himself in front of the team.

Mr. Hunt bit his lip with vexation. "One of the Federal officers came here this morning and ordered these provisions to be sent to their camp. You will only put me in trouble by delaying the driver. Move out of the way, please."

"I advise you to act with more prudence, Mr. Hunt," suggested the corporal, for such he was. "If you mean to take advantage of your political opinions to presume—"

"There is no presumption in the case," interrupted Mr. Hunt with impatience; "I must either forward these supplies as demanded or suffer the consequences of a refusal. Your regiment is indebted to me for past courtesies and favors which you know I have never withheld from you, notwithstanding our differences of opinion; and I think your interference untimely, as well as unreasonable."

"But it is our duty to prevent the enemy from getting these provisions," answered the corporal, with an air of authority.

"Under different circumstances it would have been your duty, I acknowledge; but this is an exceptional case. Complications which I cannot now explain, compel me to avoid an unpleasant encounter with the Federals. I hope you will accept my reasons without further argument, corporal."

"But you are too easily intimidated," persisted the subordinate. "I assure you, the Yankees will not hold you accountable for our proceedings. They will readily understand that

you had to submit—much against your inclination—to a superior authority.”

“Your reasoning, though logical, will not serve the purpose;” answered Mr. Hunt, leisurely taking out his watch. “It is not supposed that the Federals will brook a delay. In a quarter of an hour, perhaps before, they will send out another scout to ascertain the cause of it. And you, gentlemen, will have the satisfaction of contesting through the agency of bullets, the contents of the wagon.” He politely touched his hat, and turning on his heels, left them to their own devices.

A look of consternation swept over André’s countenance. He stepped within the enclosure and bawled out:

“Marstar, mus’ me an’ de mules stand ’mongst dem bullets?”

“Close up!” answered one of the soldiers, pointing his revolver at the frightened negro.

Confounded by Mr. Hunt’s cool and abrupt decision, the patriots stood for a moment like equestrian statues, stupidly gazing after him.

At length the corporal glanced down the road, then at the trembling driver, who was now rolling up his eyes in silent appeal.

“D—m you!” he cried, with an impatient gesture; “Drive on!”

“Does ye mean down the road, marstar?” timidously, inquired the freed man.

“Yes—and to the devil!” answered the officer, putting spurs to his horse and turning in the opposite direction.

“T’anks ter de Lawd!” enjaculated the teamster, starting off with alacrity towards the Federal camping grounds. “No governmint paid dis yere nigger fur ter git hisself kilt!”

Late in the afternoon of the next day, Zulma was cleaning a lot of moss under one of the sheds in the poultry-yard. Her

fingers flew in and out of the glossy fibre, keeping time with the merry songs which flowed in a continuous strain from her melodious throat. Some local poet had composed the lines which had been adapted to the delectable aria of "Root Pig or Die." The words were not unsuited to the air, but were certainly at variance with the voice which conveyed them.

"I'll tell you what it is,
I'll tell you what I'm thinking,
I have no fears of old Abe Lincoln;
For when he sends his boys down,
We always make them cry:
We never can subdue the South,
So run Yank or die."

Zulma had scarcely ended the first stanza when the noise of scudding hoofs arrested her attention. The riders came tearing up the road, crossed the bridge and strode up the acclivity with clash of steel and jingle of spurs. When they reached the level road, they halted and carefully surveyed their surroundings.

"Dem fellers hatching some mischief!" thought Zulma to herself. "I's gwine ter see w'at dey up to."

She squated behind the pile of moss, and watched their manœuvres. Though she deemed it prudent to make no violent demonstrations, her heart beat violently in her bosom, and she found it hard to control her resentment. The blue-coated scamps rode to the gate and unceremoniously flung it open. As they met with no opposition, they began chasing the fowls around, slashing at them with their long, glittering swords. Zulma endured this ordeal for a time, but her indignation soon got the better of her, and she suddenly emerged from her hiding place and boldly confronted the marauders.

"Hello Yaukees!" she cried. "Stop whacking off de heads of dem chickens. Was it fur dat Lincun sen' you down yere?"

"No," one of them answered turning around with a good humored laugh, "he sent us to free all you niggers."

"Lincun better ten' ter his own business. We niggers is doin' very well yere!"

"Let me look at your back, Betsy; and I'll let you know whether you stand in need of freedom or not."

"If dey's marks dare, Mr. Hunt never put 'em on; an' I let you know my name ain't Betsy, neider—you sassy Yankee, you."

"All right!" said the man, scurrying around the lot, "I'm too busy to attend to you just now." He had started after a flock of hens which scampered on outstretched wings and scattered in every direction. Among them was a stately Shanghai, the monarch of the flock. Though too unwieldly to fly over the fence, he contrived by brisk and sudden *détours*, to elude the gleaming weapon which plied most valiantly about his head. Somewhat disconcerted, the pursuer drew his bridle rein, and turning to Zulma, said:

"Head that rooster, will you?"

"You bet I won't!" she replied, shaking her apron to frighten off her favorite. "Shoo, Sultin! shoo! ain't you got sense 'nough to know dis yere man's after your blood?"

"Dog gone you!" cried the disappointed Yankee, "when I go back to Washington, I mean to get the government to scratch your name off the list of freed niggers."

"You fix me jist right!" answered Zulma, with a defiant toss of her head. "I aint got de fust idea of leaving dis yere place."

"Lookie here, girl," said his companion, pointing to some fowls which lay fluttering on the grass; "hand me those, double-quick, or I'll put a bullet through that ugly, black heart of yours."

"You mean it dem Rebs over dere give you a chance," she responded, pointing with a malicious chuckle down the road. The chicken thieves followed the glance of her dancing eye, and to their dismay, discovered a dozen Confederates riding towards them at full gallop. With a smothered cry, the unprincipled rascals bounded off like a flash of light. Zulma clapped her hands and screamed with delight. She then ran to the brow of the hill to have a better view of the chase. "Run, Yankee, run!" she cried, "Run Yank or die!"

The clatter of their horses' hoofs had almost died in the distance, when the Confederates rode furiously by. "Go it, Reb! Go it!" shouted Zulma, as they passed. She then gave vent to the exuberance of her mirth in peals of laughter, which the woods across the bayou, flung back in fantastic echoes.

"I 'clare," she remarked to Aunt Polly, the cook, who had crept up after all danger was passed. "I 'clare, I nebber laugh so much in my born days as I did after dem Yankees runnin' off from dem two chickens. War is heap funnier den a curkis!"

"I reckon it is, ter a fool nigger like you, Zulma," answered Aunt Polly, looking straight before her. "You aint got sense 'nough ter know w'at dev's fightin' 'bout."

"An' I ain't gwine to crack my head open tryin' ter fin' out," responded Zulma, with a knowing look. "All I knows 'bout it is, dem Confederates' mighty handy, w'en de Yanks is cleanin' out yo' chicken yard."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COUSINS.

THE eventful week vanished at last, and with it, departed the authors of its manifold terrors and disturbances. The invaders had sustained a variety of assaults from Captain R.'s gallant boys, who glorified in giving them a specimen of their skill and valor whenever the occasion presented itself. These skirmishes and sallies took place, each time foraging scouts were sent out, or whenever camp epicureans undertook to explore the planters' poultry yards. Without these wholesome and timely restraints on the enemy's rapacity, their depredations would have been unlimited and irreparable. When the last Federal straggler had scudded out of sight, and a sense of security had once more settled in their midst, the people of Gross Tete, figuratively, drew a long breath and mentally congratulated themselves on their happy delivery from their hostile visitors. As the school on Fordorche had been suspended during the invasion, Lucile shared with her parents the anxieties and fatigues entailed upon them by the illness of the stranger who had so inauspiciously thrust himself under their roof. For nearly a week, the wounded man lay stricken with fever; he was too weak and helpless to be cognizant of the perils which surrounded him. His strongest mental exertion, seemed directed towards Mrs. Hunt, his gentle nurse, who constantly applied cooling lotions to the throbbing wound on his arm, and soothed his sufferings by the touch of her

soft hands upon his fevered brow. Sometimes he followed with listless eyes—sometimes with a puzzled expression, her movements as she silently administered to his wants. On the third day of his illness, he awoke with a clearer consciousness of his actual condition, and he met his cousin's eyes with a smile saying; "I remember the circumstance of my encounter with the Yankees and your kindness in giving me shelter for the night; —but— I must have dreamed of having accidentally discovered that we were related to each other. This is undoubtedly a vagary of my wandering mind."

Mrs. Hunt, who was at that moment standing at his bedside, returned his eager, questioning gaze with a look full of compassionate interest. "It is no dream, no idle fancy," she answered, affectionately, placing her hand upon his forehead. "Our fathers were brothers, and *you* are my own dear thrice welcome kinsman.

"You are more than kin to me," he said drawing to his lips, the white hand that lay caressingly on his head. "You are my angel guardian, you saved my life!"

Mrs. Hunt hastily withdrew her hand from his warm clasp.

"I have acted towards you; dear cousin, as I would have done towards any of our soldiers under similar circumstances; only, my solitude in your behalf was augmented and my affection, naturally, awakened by reason of the family ties which unite us."

"How can I ever repay you for all you've done for me?" he said, closing his dark-grey eyes to hide the tears which suffused them.

"By holding me in your loving remembrance, dear cousin;" answered Mrs. Hunt, struggling to hide her emotions; "and by making this your home until your health permits you to rejoin your regiment."

"How long have I been here?" the young man asked; suddenly opening his eyes.

"Three days, exactly."

"Then I must have been very ill," he observed, with a slight contraction of his eyebrows. "I recollect nothing that transpired during that interval, except seeing people moving about my bed—others, beside you, were there not, cousin?"

"You saw my husband and one of our faithful servants."

"Your face seems very familiar to me."

"No wonder," said Mrs. Hunt smiling.

"I have forgotten your name;" he remarked, laying his hand upon her arm.

"Indeed you have not, for I never mentioned it to you. Elise is my name."

"Have you no children?"

"Yes; one daughter. Now, Cousin Eugene, I mean to assume the character of an obdurate nurse, and I shall begin by imposing strict silence until after you have taken some nourishment. Shall I bring you some broth? We have hitherto been giving it to you without your leave;" she added, giving him a bright, cheerful look.

"Yes, I will take anything you bring me." But his momentary interest seemed wavering, and his eyelids involuntarily fell upon his cheeks as in restful slumber. Mrs. Hunt drew the curtain across the window and noiselessly stepped out of the apartment.

In the third week of November, the interesting patient had sufficiently recovered his health to join the family circle, and even to accompany Mr. Hunt in his long walks through the fields. His convalescence had been spent most pleasantly and profitably in the bosom of his new-found friends and kinsmen. The atmosphere of ease, love and refinement which surrounded

him, was an agreeable contrast to his recent life of turmoil and hardship, and he accepted the transition with that quiescence and self-complacency, which doubtless hastened his recovery. The weather in the latter part of this month, was deliciously warm, and Mr. Hunt drove his wife's cousin out to False River to satisfy his longing to look upon the scene of his father's youth; he wished to ramble among the deserted apartments of the quaint old home, to saunter beneath the aged trees and over the grounds, once so familiar to his parent. He returned to Grosse Tete with his mind full of retrospective ideas. This was the first long ride Eugene had taken since his illness, and he complained of fatigue. Lucile brought him a glass of wine; it was homemade, but clear as crystal, and as fragrant as ambrosia; the effects were immediately beneficial.

The Hunts were particularly fond of the open air, and they took their seats on the gallery to enjoy the perfectly lovely weather. The rayless disk of the sun, long past the meridian, hung like a red ball in the grey atmosphere. Nature had donned her most gorgeous attire. The double row of young china trees which shaded the roadside, dazzled the eyes with the splendor of their golden foliage. The languishing breeze wafted the sweet odor of the olive flowers. Close to the steps, a rose-bush, invigorated by the late rains, had thrust out half a dozen stalks which bent over with the weight of superb buds, just bursting into beauty and fragrance. They were the last gifts of autumn. Conversation was reminiscent, "*Corne à Chevreuil*" being the chief and most interesting topic. At length, Mr. Hunt was called away, and his wife returned to her domestic occupations. The burden of conversation then fell on the young people. Lucile was industriously stitching the cloth destined to shape the cap which was to replace the one her cousin had lost in his hasty retreat from the Fed-

eral scouts. Her occupation served as a vent to her girlish timidity, for she plied her fingers with unwonted energy whenever she was at loss for a suitable answer to any of her cousin's questions, or was in anyway abashed by his careless and candid remarks. There was a certain congeniality between the young cousins, and they had grown quite fond of each other's society. The novelty of possessing a relative outside of her own family was a fact so delightful to Lucile, that she inadvertently disclosed to him the many admirable traits of her mind and fascinated him with her frank, winning ways; consequently, he was falling desperately in love with her. She was so young and affectionate, he imagined it would be a sweet and easy task to win her gentle and untutored heart, for he had every reason to believe that it had never awakened to tenderer emotions than those she cherished for her parents. Had Lucile been a coquette, she would have embraced a splendid opportunity of carrying on a flirtation with her handsome relative, but she was too scrupulously honest to give encouragement of that sort, when her affections had been tacidly pledged to another. Several times during the course of the evening, Lucile's violet eyes dropped beneath her cousin's earnest gaze of admiration. Her embarrassment only led him to believe that she was not altogether indifferent to his growing attachment, and it filled his heart with pride to know that he might one day, win the heart and hand of the lovely girl, upon whom nature seemed to have lavished her choicest gifts. These pleasant reflections on the part of the sanguine lover were somewhat unexpectedly interrupted by a caller. There tripped up the alley, a young girl, resplendent in pink calico. By the way, a calico gown was not to be despised at this particular period of the war. On the contrary, the article was prized above silks, velvets, or any of those costly fab-

rics which savored of ante-bellum fineries and made-over garments. In those days, the height of feminine ambition, was the possession of a bran-new calico gown. No wonder Nannie Dawsey hurried off to make a display of hers; very few of the Grosse Tete girls could boast of such an acquisition. She had heard of the distinguished young officer tarrying at Highland, and came with the intentions of making an impression. "This twenty dollar gown will surely settle him;" she said, gayly wending her way; "if it don't, I should like to know what *will*?"

"What young lady is that, Cousin Lucile?" asked young Lafitte, catching a glimpse of the lissome figure glancing through the shrubbery.

"The daughter of one of our neighbors, and a schoolmate of mine."

"Isn't she pretty?" he whispered, bringing his lips to a close proximity to his cousin's dainty ear. "She's like a picture cut out of a frame."

Nannie smilingly planted her foot on the lower rank of the front steps, and stood there, for a few seconds, silently contemplating the couple. Her attitude was in keeping with the mischievous expression on her fresh, young face.

"Come up, Nannie," said Lucile, with a pleasant smile.

"Thank you; it's not my intention to pose, Lucile;" answered she, running up the steps.

Lucile introduced her to her cousin.

"Oh! let us shake hands," cried Nannie. "I am so glad you came—that is so glad on Lucile's account. She has always been wishing for uncles and aunts and cousins. I know she's perfectly happy now that you have turned up."

"I cannot answer for my cousin's sentiments, Miss Dawsey;" answered Eugene, casting a side glance at Lucile. "I can only vouch for mine."

"You wouldn't ask for a nicer set of relations, would you? I'm sure Lucile can't object to *you*?"

"It would grieve me to know that she did;" answered the young man, laughing.

Nannie settled herself in Mr. Hunt's armchair, and critically surveyed the stranger. "And so you're a Texan?" she ventured to ask.

"I'm proud to acknowledge the fact, miss;" he answered with an inclination of the head.

"You don't look a bit like those Texans I once saw. They were ferocious, rough looking fellows, dressed in yellow homespun clothes. They were far more ambitious of getting into people's watermelon patches than fights with the Yankees; and they struck me as being the dirtiest and greediest set of men I ever laid eyes on; they didn't seem to have a spark of patriotism about them."

"Why Nannie!" exclaimed Lucile. "How can you make fun of those brave men, who fought so gallantly in the defense of our State?"

A wave of color surged over the officer's pale cheeks.

"Those very Texans you ridicule and disparage, belonged to General Green's army. I am one of his couriers and know from personal observations that a braver and more valiant set of men never took up arms in defense of the Confederacy."

Nannie opened her eyes in astonishment at the young man's resentment. "My goodness!" she cried. "I didn't mean to insult you!"

Lucile cast a swift, uneasy glance at her cousin, and said in a pacifying tone of voice: "Nannie was trying to tease you,

Cousin Eugene. If you were to hear her sing Colonel Hamilton Washington's song of defiance, you would think she was a real Texas girl. Now, Nannie, you must sing it to atone for your careless and unkind remarks."

"I never go back on my word, Lucile," answered Nannie, rising. "I'm going to Rosanna's, have you a message to send." This with a significant elevation of her eyebrows.

"Give her my love."

"By the by, when do you intend coming back to school?" demanded Nannie. "Mr. Gilbert hasn't given you your diploma, I hope?"

"Will the fact excite your envy? I am surprised at your solicitude regarding my education."

"Oh, I'm not a bit bothered about you. I only want you to come back to help me with my sums. I can't bluff the professor much longer, you know. He's losing faith in my everlasting headaches."

"I think you ought to be more self-reliant, Nannie, and not depend on others to do your work. How can you ever finish your education, unless you apply yourself to your studies?"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Nannie, twirling on her forefinger, her pretty palmetto hat. "Everybody hasn't the same tastes. All the professors in the world couldn't turn me into a book-worm, much less into a mathematician. I wasn't cut out to be a 'blue stocking' like you, Lucile."

"Why Nannie, I haven't the remotest idea of becoming a literary woman!"

"I reckon not, as long as Herbert Davis dances attendance on you."

The color leaped into Lucile's face, but she refrained from making an unkind retort. Her cousin noticed, with surprise

and concern, her painful embarrassment. Nannie broke into a rippling laugh.

"My, Lucile!" she exclaimed. People needn't hunt for roses when you are about. They have only to say: "*Sesame*," and out they blow! But really I must be going. Bud is out there holding my pony, and I must not keep him waiting. I only came in to know whether you're ever coming back to school, Lucile?"

"I think of returning next Monday."

"Then, I advise you to overlook 'Organic Chemistry.' We are to pass examination at the close of the month, you know."

"I'm ready for the ordeal, thank you, Nannie."

"Now, I'm going," reiterated the girl, with unusual trepidation in her manners. I hope you're not mad with me;" she said at last, thrusting out her hand to Mr. Lafitte.

"Certainly not," he answered. "I am sorry I allowed your remarks to irritate me."

"Oh never mind that! Myself I have a temper. May I have one of these roses, Lucile?" Nannie asked, stooping over the bush near the steps. I want one for Herbert in case I find him at home."

"Is Herbert her sweetheart?" asked Eugene.

Lucile's heart gave a great throb.

"No;" she answered, with a quiver in her voice. Herbert and Nannie are so unlike in disposition, I imagine they are not very congenial."

"Oh, that does not signify! Cousin Lucile. I have known people of opposite characters, and tastes, to fall desperately in love with each other."

"Indeed!" and Lucile stared at him with a look of astonishment. "I thought that there could be no love between

people without a certain amount of affinity to attract them. Now, papa and mamma are devoted to each other, but they are congenial. Nannie is what you would call a frivolous girl; Herbert is of a serious, studious turn of mind; how can there be any sympathy between them?"

"The very fact of this difference in their character, may be the magnet between them. Poles containing different kinds of fluids, naturally attract each other. It is very possible, that the mind is controlled by similar natural laws, as these external objects."

"Then I must be different from everybody else;" pursued Lucile, "for I love best those friends who most resemble me in disposition."

"How many friends have you, Cousin Lucile?"

"Hosts of them; but I love only a few *very* dearly."

The young man's sombre eyes looked into hers with keen scrutiny: "Tell me their names, please."

"Rosanna, Herbert and Corine!"

"And who is this Herbert, anyway?" he asked with an impatient gesture.

"Herbert Davis is the son of one of our neighbors, and a whilom schoolmate of mine. You must not ask me who anybody else is, for you will find my answers somewhat monotonous."

"I want you to add another name to your list, cousin mine."

"Yours?" suggested Lucile, with a coy look.

"Yes; it is to be carved first and foremost on the tablet of your memory, and it must be underscored so as to be prominent and distinct from the others inscribed upon it."

Lucile turned upon him, her sweet, ingenuous countenance, saying: "You are really *too* exigent, Cousin Eugene. You must be satisfied where I put you."

"I will, provided you put me where I wish to be. And remember I cannot brook a rival."

"Don't be afraid," replied Lucile looking up with a bright smile. "I shall never permit any one to usurp your place."

A feeling akin to disappointment crept into the young man's heart. A moment ago, it was his ardent desire to win his cousin's affections. Now, he almost wished that Lucile were less susceptible, and would give him a chance to struggle for her love. He disliked the idea of her unconditional surrender, and was at loss how to accept it. While these uncourteous reflections filled his mind, his eyes wandered over her faultless face and he suddenly caught the frank, innocent expression in hers. He was stricken with remorse, and a longing to win her pure, undivided love, once again flooded his heart.

"Do you really intend going back to school next Monday?" he asked, drawing his chair nearer to hers.

"Did you not hear me tell Nannie that such was my intention. I have already lost three weeks." She fluttered like a bird entangled in a net.

"Dear Lucile, do you regret the time you lost?"

He leaned over and laid his fingers tenderly upon her hair which hung in a lustrous braid across her shoulder. Lucile shrank from his touch with unconcealed displeasure and began putting up her work.

"Of course not;" she faltered, "I should not have made your acquaintance had I gone."

"I too, will take my departure some time next week. Will you miss me, Lucile?"

"I'm sure, we shall *all* miss you; but you will visit us again, will you not, cousin?"

"My return will depend on circumstances."

"That's true; a soldier is not at liberty to go where he pleases;" rejoined Lucile, fixing upon him eyes overbrimming with candor.

"My destiny is in your hands, my precious cousin; and your heart shall decide whether I shall ever see you again."

There was something in her cousin's voice which ruffled the serenity of Lucile's mind, and she rose from her seat with such precipitation, that a ball of cotton thread rolled out of her basket. He scrambled across the floor in pursuit, and thumped his head against the balustrade, just as the ball rolled from the gallery into the *parterre*.

"Oh, my dear cousin! Did you break your head?" asked Lucile, suppressing a laugh.

"I am generally more expert with my right hand;" replied Eugene, glancing at his bandaged arm. "But I'm curious to know," added he, turning his dark-grey eyes upon Lucile, "whether I would be more successful if I were to make an attempt to capture somebody's heart?"

"If you do," suggested Lucile with a mischievous look, "I advise you to begin before your arm is out of the sling."

"And why should I?" he asked, in a constrained, uneasy tone of voice.

"Because you look so interesting that way. You could work on one's feelings, with so much facility, it seems to me."

"If I knew my chances were going to be diminished, I would try the experiment on you, fair cousin."

"Spare yourself the trouble;" answered Lucile, with heightened color. "My heart is not to be disposed of. And—and I must inform you that you have no right to speak to me in that way."

An undefinable expression lighted up Eugene Lafitte's handsome face as he muttered: "Forgive me, I did not mean

to offend you, Lucile. I was over-hasty and inconsiderate."

"You are excusable," answered Lucile somewhat coldly.

"But—some day, dear cousin," he continued, "after the war is over and I have won laurels to lay at your feet, will you not grant me the privilege of suing for your love?"

The girl threw out her little hand in a frightened, deprecating manner. "I love you already, as much as I ever shall—as much as mamma does!" she explained. "You must not speak to me on that subject again. I have the best reasons in the world to forbid it, Cousin Eugene."

This sudden revolution in Lucile's feelings and behavior, seemed so uncalled for, that her cousin stood for some moments stock-still, watching in silent amazement, the slight, erect form so beautifully silhouetted against the dark, clustering vines. Her apparent dismay was attributed to her childish timidity; he loved her more for it, and stretched out his hands towards her, saying:

"Let us be friends, Lucile!"

"Have we quarreled?" she asked, giving him one of hers, with evident reluctance.

"Not so dreadfully as to exclude a reconciliation;" he responded with great warmth. "You must remember, that in less than three days we must part, dear Lucile."

"Please call me Cousin Lucile."

"Oh don't ask me that!" he answered in a tone of subdued tenderness. "*Lucile* is very much sweeter without that incumbrance."

"Zulma has forgotten to bring in the lights," Lucile remarked, taking up her basket. She went in, lit the candles and placed them on the piano; then, timidly invited her cousin to come in.

"Not now, thank you, Cousin Lucile;" he answered, in a somewhat pathetic tone of voice. "I shall sit here in the twilight; it is very congenial to my present state of mind."

Lucile feared she had wounded his feelings, and addressed him in a kinder tone:

"Come out of the night air, Cousin Eugene, and help me sing."

She lingered in the doorway, waiting for him.

"You treat me like the Sea Islanders do their song birds, Cousin Lucile; they put out their eyes that they may sing the sweeter in utter darkness and distress."

"I see no analogy between your case and theirs;" answered Lucile, wonderingly.

"Why you stab me through the heart, and then deliberately call me up to sing."

"My dear cousin!" cried Lucile with genuine compunction in her voice. "How unkind of you to compare me with those barbarians! Why, I would not hurt a fly—much less *you*, whom I dearly love."

She returned to the piano, opened it, and began playing "*Reveil des Oiseaux*." The brilliant music filled the room and floated out in the open air. Eugene Lafitte listened, while he watched a star which hovered on the verge of the southern horizon. It vanished, at last, like a great diamond dropped into a velvet casket. The showering music caught up a sigh which fell from his tremulous lips, and tenderly laid it in the bosom of Night.

CHAPTER XXII.

JUST FOR FUN.

AFTER many a *détour* through a variety of soil and scenery, bayou Fordorche terminates its wanderings and joins Grosse Tete at a short distance above Livonia. At this period of the war, the banks at the junction were considerably higher than the surrounding country, and commanded an admirable view of bayou Grosse Tete, and the public road winding along its shores. The school house, once the residence of a wealthy planter, occupied the site on the left bank of the Fordorche. It was one of the old creole houses freshened up with paint, modernized, and supplemented by venetian blinds. The deep galleries which encompassed it, gave it an airy, home-like appearance, and efficiently warded off the summer heat. It was surrounded by extensive grounds, beautified by flower-beds and groves of stately trees. In early spring, the richly variegated flowers of the catalpa carpeted the sward, and their broad, velvety leaves over-shadowed the galleries and made moan throughout the summer time. On warm evenings the boarders brought out their books and charts and prepared their lessons in the shaded avenues, or played quiet games until the tea bell summoned them to the most delightful repast of the day.

There was no fixed curriculum of studies in the school; and the advanced pupils were allowed to pursue the branches

most suited to their abilities or natural inclinations. The discipline was mild, permitting the freedom of social intercourse between the pupils and their friends. After the dismissal of the evening classes, the young ladies often received calls, paid visits, and on rare occasions attended the little receptions held in the neighborhood.

On the Wednesday following her last visit to Lucile, Nannie sat at one of the windows of her room, tustling with the promiscuous examples in *Proportion*. After figuring and toiling over her sums with very doubtful results, she threw aside her book and slate, heaved a deep sigh, and flung her arms wearily across the back of the chair. Her eyes wandered listlessly across the way, to a point where a sweeping view of the waters of Grosse Tete reflected the last ruddy glow of the setting sun. The trees, the tawny banks and rail fences, were all vividly mirrored on its tranquil surface. The scene was as beautiful and placid as a picture on canvas. But Nannie was no artist, and the charming landscape gave her no pleasure; her thoughts were busy with matters of personal interest. She was thinking of Herbert's loyalty to Lucile and his provoking indifference towards other girls.

"Lucile ought to be teased for monopolizing the finest looking fellow around," she soliloquized; "and Herbert, he deserves to be punished for his conceit. Thinks nobody but Lucile worthy of his thoughts. Dear me! it wouldn't take me five minutes to smash up this little love affair of theirs; and I've a notion of doing it, just for fun! It won't hurt Lucile much; she'll fall back on that cousin of hers. She's half way in love with him now, for she's given up her school on his account, and that means a good deal for a girl like Lucile. Of course, I'll do it, if only I have a chance; lovers' quarrels are so interesting!" Nannie's monologue came to a sudden term-

ination; she bolted from a chair and riveted her eyes on a distant curve in the bayou. She had caught a glimpse of the reflection of a rider galloping in lithe bounds in the direction of the school-house. Several times the graceful image was intercepted by clumps of trees, but it again reappeared, gliding on the smooth saphyrine surface of the water. At length the horseman emerged into full view on the public road. Nannie bounded down the steps. She got to the gate just as Herbert Davis reached it.

"Hold on! Herbert," she cried, waving her hand. "I've got a commission for you."

"From the department?" he asked, lifting his hat to her.

"You presumptuous boy, you! I should like to know what you did to deserve one of that sort?"

"How is everybody?" Herbert asked, searching with eager eyes the grounds and galleries.

"If by *everybody* you mean Lucile," answered Nannie, "you'll have to stop at her house to ascertain; she's not here."

"Not here?" echoed Herbert with surprise. "What has happened? Is she sick?"

"I reckon not," said Nannie, trying to pulverize with her heel, a minature heap of dried leaves. "She's at home, entertaining that handsome cousin of hers."

"None of your nonsense, Nannie! Tell me what is the matter with Lucile. Its late and I'm in a hurry to get home."

"Why, Herbert! you don't tell me you haven't heard about this Texan staying at Highland?"

"Of course not," answered Herbert, in a strained, uneasy tone of voice. "I haven't seen anyone from home for nearly a month. What about him?"

"Well," began Nannie, inclining her head to one side in the most fascinating manner. "All I know about him is this: he's the son of one of Mrs. Hunt's uncles, who lives in Texas—got wounded; came to be nursed; made a big impression on every member of the family, especially on Lucile, who is perfectly infatuated with him. She and Mr. Lafitte are having a lovely time of it, you bet."

"The dence they are! And what do you call a lovely time, Nannie?"

"Why, flirting and carrying on generally," answered Nannie, with a fluttering heart. That's what young people generally do when they get together. When I was there, one afternoon, they were sitting out on the gallery, enjoying themselves. They reminded me of two pigeons, they were so sweet and affectionate towards each other!"

"Confound it!" exclaimed Herbert, with cheeks aflame. I don't believe a word of all this, Nannie. I know you're mean enough to make up that tale just to tease me!"

"I declare! you are very easily teased then. Where's the harm?" But fearing that she had gone too far, she stepped in front of Herbert's horse, which she clutched by the forelock, saying, "Looky here, Herbert, you're not going to begrudge poor Lucile the little innocent fun she's having, are you?"

He gave her a look which sent the blood bounding to her heart. "Was this the commission you had for me?" he asked, almost transfixing her with an angry glance of his dark eyes.

"No, I promised one of my friends to lend her my 'Bulah,' and I want you to fetch it; it's at your house."

Poor Herbert was too proud to allow Nannie to see to what extent her frivolous words had affected him. He could

not trust himself another moment, nor master the emotions which swept like fiery waves across his heart. Silently and resolutely he extricated the girls fingers from his horse's mane and started off; his only refuge was in flight.

Nannie stood in the middle of the road watching him until he disappeared from view. "Gracious!" she exclaimed, "I'm real sorry I've done the thing. He's going to pitch into Lucile and give her fits; and she mightn't have been flirting after all! I wonder how it will all end?"

Herbert rode several miles at a furious rate, then suddenly stopped and brought his steed to a slow walk. The purple twilight gathered around him, and the night wind sprang up and tossed a bevy of seared leaves across the road. They whirled about his horse's hoofs with sounds which grated upon his ears and unnerved him. He determined to see Lucile immediately, in order to take leave of her. She had permitted the stranger to make love to her—*she*, who had given him her promise to keep her heart's affections inviolate until he claimed them as a reward for his unalterable devotion and loyalty. She was now unworthy of such love as he had given her; he would tear her image from his heart, and steel himself against her alluring voice and winning ways. His outraged affections, his wounded pride, and his disappointment, filled his soul with bitter strife and anger. It was a relief for him to know that he would soon leave the parish for the heat and burden of actual warfare. He now longed to lay down his life for the dear Southern Cause. Once his ambition was to win honors to lay at Lucile's feet. Heaven! what changes will overtake a man in an hour's time! Such were the reflections which crossed and recrossed Herbert's mind as he journeyed onward in the waning light. He got to Highland at dusk. As he approached the house, he noticed that the can-

dles were burning in the parlor. No one seemed to hear his footfalls upon the gravel. The parlor doors stood wide open, the light from within streamed across the gallery to where the house plants seemed crystalized in its unnatural glare. Even in his anger and wretchedness, Herbert remembered his manners; he stood discreetly aside and rapped. "Come in," answered a voice which sent a thrill through his soul.

With head proudly erect, and flushed cheeks, Herbert stepped into the apartment. Lucile sat at a table writing; at the sight of her visitor; she quickly arose to greet him.

"Oh! is it you, Herbert?" she cried, almost joyfully. "I took you for the messenger we had sent out to False River." She looked so exquisitely fair and dainty; there was such a glad, innocent expression in her beautiful eyes, that for a second, Herbert stood mute and spell-bound in the presence of the girl he had come to upbraid.

When he spoke his voice was hoarse and unnatural. "There was a time when you never mistook my footsteps for another's;" he answered almost fiercely.

Lucile, who had started across the room to meet her friend, involuntarily staggered back towards the table. There was something in Herbert's voice and manners, which frightened and repulsed her.

"What has happened, Herbert?" she cried with dismay. "Tell me quickly."

Herbert's face was now white and drawn; his fine eyes flashed ominously. Wild and reckless thoughts drifted across his heated brain. Had Lucile been less beautiful, his loss would have been more endurable. It was terribly hard to pronounce his own sentence, and by his own act to alienate himself forever from the lovely being upon whom rested his life's happiness. He had observed, that whenever she addressed him, it

was in a low, cautious tone, as though she feared to be overheard. Undoubtedly she was trying to prevent her lover from discovering that he had a rival in the house. The thought maddened him. He made a few steps toward Lucile, his heart bursting with rage and jealousy. "I have come for the express purpose of giving you back your troth, Lucile," he began. "You are sufficiently acquainted with my character to know, that I would *scorn* to keep it an hour longer than I could help, after what has happened between you and that *soit disant* cousin of yours."

"I do not understand your meaning, Herbert," said Lucile, in a dazed helpless way. Give me an explanation of this extraordinary behavior of yours—and—and—please do not speak so loud, Herbert" she begged in a subdued, pathetic tone of voice.

The blood of indignation once more usurped the deathly pallor of his cheeks; he folded his arms composedly across his breast and looked defiantly into Lucile's misty eyes.

"There was a time," he went on, "when, in my blind worship of you, I invested you with virtues and qualities seldom found on earth. To me, you were as guileless as a child; deceit in any form was as foreign to your nature as to an angel in Heaven. Oh, God! how I have been punished for having thus made you my idol, my divinity!"

"It was wrong of you, Herbert," cried Lucile, sinking into a chair near by. "I am but human, and have my faults like other people!" And she buried in her hands her white, suffering face.

"To my sorrow, I have found this out, Lucile!" continued Herbert, in a bitter, sarcastic tone. "You are no better than other girls; the instinct of coquetry is as natural to you as to the rest; and you succumbed as readily to temptation,

when the opportunity presented itself. My love for you once filled my heart to the exclusion of all others, it has all turned to ashes; you are at this moment less to me than any other human being, and I no longer care for your love or esteem. In a few days I shall leave the parish to join another command. Would to God I could lay down my life on some distant battle field. You have so ruined, so embittered my existence, that I no longer care for earthly ties. I only wish I could obliterate the past from my memory, and that my heart could be turned to stone! I wish I were dead!"

As he uttered the last words, the unhappy youth clasped his hand across his burning eyes and leaned against the wall for support; Lucile watched him with cheeks that paled and flushed alternately. Had Herbert plunged his sword into her heart, he could not have wounded her as deeply and cruelly as he had done by his passionate, unjust and humiliating reproaches. At first she was at loss to understand the cause of his angry tirade. It dawned upon her by degrees, that Herbert was accusing her of some grave and unpardonable misdemeanor, the nature of which she was entirely ignorant. He ended by informing her that she had lost his love and esteem. Could he have said anything more crushingly mortifying? Her pride and self-respect promptly asserted themselves, and she immediately recovered her presence of mind. Her graceful head went up, almost haughtily, and the latent fire in her violet eyes flashed out across the room, to where Herbert stood in an attitude of pitiable dejection. "I have listened, very patiently," she remarked, in a calm, dispassionate tone, "to your unjust and shocking insinuations; but I shall not attempt to exculpate myself, Herbert; I haven't the least desire to reinstate myself in your good opinion."

"The attempt would be useless and vain, unhappily for us both," he answered, lifting up his head and gazing sorrowfully into Lucile's eyes, "There is no palliation for the harm done."

Her lips contracted with ill-repressed pain. "I pity you from the bottom of my heart," Lucile said, in a low, intense voice. "Some day you will weep tears of blood for the injustice you have done me."

"If the Lucile I once knew and loved could be restored to me, I should be willing to weep those tears!" he responded in despairing accents! Then casting upon Lucile an appealing look, he asked: "Have you nothing more to say to me?"

"Nothing more."

"Then, farewell! I shall never again cross your path in life, Lucile. Farewell!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

LOVE'S WARFARE.

LUCILE made a superhuman effort to stifle the sob which rose to her throat and threatened to suffocate her. She overcame her weakness, however, and gave no further sign of the awful struggle within her. She sat silent and motionless until Herbert had passed out of her sight. Then her head fell inertly against the back of her chair, and a smothered moan escaped her quivering mouth. All the woes of life seemed crowding into her bursting heart. Surely, God had overrated her strength, for the cross was heavier than she could bear. She remembered now, that in one of her daily oraisons she had asked for crosses. In her childish faith and simplicity, she had invariably stipulated that they might be of any nature, save the death of her dear parents. God had taken her at her word and He had not spared her, for the burden he had laid upon her shoulder had prostrated her to the earth, and she made no effort to fortify herself against the unexpected trial.

The silvery tones of the supper bell broke upon Lucile's melancholy reflections, but she made no attempt to answer its summons. She felt like one stunned, incapable of resuming her duties, however urgent.

"Ain't you comin' in to supper?" Zulma asked, walking up to where Lucile sat. "Master done troo weighin' cotton

and is waitin' for you in de dinin' room. Lawd a mercy!" the girl ejaculated, on observing the change in Lucile's face. "I do believe you've been stealin' a nap, Miss Lucile, yo' eyes done swell up like as if you'd been sleepin' for a whole year. It's time yo' maw gets over dat spell of hern; stayin' up of nights don't agree wid you—it certainly don't."

"Ask Papa to excuse me, Zulma; I'm not at all well, and don't care for supper," Lucile said, with tears in her voice. "I must attend to Mamma; I have already been away too long."

She gathered up her writing materials as she spoke, and placed them in her secretary; then passed her hand over her face as if to compose and efface from her features such traces of emotion as might betray her suffering to her mother.

"Is my sweet Mamma awake?" asked Lucile, bending over and imprinting a fervent kiss upon her mother's lips.

"I have been for sometime, darling; I did not call you, because I heard you entertaining a caller. Who was it dear?"

"Herbert stopped here a little while, Mamma."

Mrs. Hunt did not notice the little hands pressing tight against the throbbing heart; nor could she, in the uncertain light, perceive the pallor which suddenly overspread the countenance of her daughter.

"That must have been an agreeable surprise to you;" remarked Mrs. Hunt, carressing the head which had fallen upon the pillow close to hers.

"Yes, Mamma, I was not expecting to see Herbert to-day."

Lucile felt her strength slowly ebbing away. O God! must she have recourse to prevarication, in order to hide Herbert's outrageous behavior towards her, and to avoid confessing their painful and humiliating estrangement.

"Mamma," she began, with a sob in her voice, "Herbert told me, that—he is going away—very soon—to join another command. We shall never meet again. Oh, Mamma!" And her pent up feelings broke from her, like a mountain torrent just loosened from the icy grip of a northern winter.

"What a foolish, unpatriotic little sweetheart Herbert has!" exclaimed Mrs. Hunt, drawing Lucile to her bosom. "Why, Lucile you are not at all like those Spartan women you used to admire so much. Could you not pluck up courage, dry your tears, and bid your lover 'God speed?' Herbert is so young, so full of chivalric notions and so ambitious of winning fame; you should be the last person in the world to put a damper on his ardor and enthusiasm. And Lucile, my darling, I hope you will never let him see that you are fretting and that his departure is so afflicting to you."

"Oh, Mamma!" cried Lucile, drying up her tears. "Have you no better opinion of me? These are the first tears I have shed on Herbert's account, and he shall never know that I miss him, or even regret him!"

"You are running in the opposite extreme," said her mother, smiling. "Of course, you will miss Herbert; it will be but natural, if you have any love for him. Now, my precious daughter, jump down, bathe your eyes and hand me the powders."

This was the third day of Mrs. Hunt's illness. She had fallen sick very suddenly, on Monday morning, just as Lucile was about starting for school. The anxieties of her devoted husband and daughter knew no bounds; and they never, even for an hour, abandoned her bedside, until after the doctor had pronounced her out of danger. Half an hour before Herbert's unpropitious call, Mrs. Hunt had fallen into a refreshing sleep. In his jealousy and rage, he had attributed to other motives, Lucile's anxiety to suppress loud talking.

Just about this period, preparations were being made in northwest Louisiana to resist a formidable invasion projected by Federal authorities. General Green, after his brilliant exploits on the Teche and on Red River, was now making ready to second General Taylor in the approaching campaign. When these tidings reached Eugene Lafitte, he immediately made up his mind to rejoin his command, notwithstanding his disabled condition. No entreaty on the part of his relatives, could prevail upon him to remain another week. He took his departure on Sunday, the day before Mrs. Hunt's dangerous attack. Thus, poor Lucile had been misjudged by the very ones who should have sympathized with her in her trials.

But to return to Herbert. He was, in reality, a thousand times more miserable after his interview with Lucile, than he had been whilst he still held his resentment locked up in his bosom. He had not gained anything by his impetuous conduct. To his infinite sorrow and shame, he had acted rudely and unkindly to the most refined and sensitive being on earth. He understood, but *too* late, that he had taken the words of a frivolous creature, and condemned Lucile without a hearing. And what right had he to reprimand her for violating a pledge he had almost extorted from her? These and other painful reflections, harrassed and perplexed his mind. He was most wretched and despicable in his own estimation. He repeatedly passed his hand across his throbbing temples and groaned aloud. He rode along, at a slow pace, in order to give time to his feelings to subside before reaching his home. Several times he lifted his aching eyes to the glowing heavens. Many of the constellations he had studied with Lucile's assistance, now paved the sky with pulsing splendor. There was Taurus, with its jeweled clusters; the gleaming sword of Orion, his starry belt and epaulets, marked the field where the noted

hunter forever defied his untiring adversary; the red planet, Mars, like a carbuncle, blazed between the horns of the bull. The creamy light of Capella, and Kigel's white lustre completed the magnificent cortège just risen above the horizon. Herbert never looked at the stars without thinking of the sweet face he had so often seen lifted towards them in admiration or in earnest study. How often, when in loving contemplation of that face he had lost the drift of her delightful conceits, and got his heartstrings hopelessly entangled in the geometrical figures she traced out in order to facilitate his progress in the study of astronomy. Those dear, golden days had vanished, never to return! What would this world be to him without Lucile?—a desert waste. And yet, he must plod through it without hope or ambition of any kind. Only this morning, his mind was overcrowded with glorious plans for the future; his heart ached to impart them to Lucile. He had been overtaken by an overwhelming misfortune; he was left without a vestige of hope to cheer him in the hazardous career he had chosen. Herbert's manliness seemed to have suddenly, forsaken him. His head drooped upon his breast; and the burning tears chased each other down his colorless cheeks. As fast as they fell, he dashed them off quickly and impatiently, like one ashamed of his own weakness.

Herbert found his family assembled at the supper table. He was greeted with acclamations of joy and surprise. His mother and the younger members of the household, crowded around him and covered his face with heart-felt kisses, and his father welcomed him with warmth. In the boisterous excitement which prevailed, the family had overlooked the change which had been wrought in his customary cheerful and happy disposition. It was only after Herbert had declined to join

them at their meal, that they noticed the unnatural pallor of his face and the dark rings which encircled his eyes.

"My dear boy," exclaimed Mrs. Davis, with natural alarm. "You look awful; have you been sick?"

"No, mother, but I have a very bad headache;" answered Herbert, steadying his voice.

"O brother!" chimed in Rosanna, laying down the plate she had brought for Herbert. "You have been ill and have hidden the fact from us. Well, I'm glad we have you here; we'll nurse you so well, and give you such a good time, you'll be your old self again in less than a week."

"I'm obliged to you for your kind intentions, sister, but I cannot stay longer than to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" echoed Mrs. Davis. "My dear, darling boy, you must not think of going back so soon; you're not in a condition to expose yourself to the hardships of camp life."

"No, Herbert," rejoined his father with concern, "you had better stay until you feel better."

"But, Father," answered Herbert, "I am on furlough, and am in honor bound to report to-morrow by sunset. I only came to announce to you my departure for the Teche country."

"Dear son!" once more exclaimed Mrs. Davis. "What in the name of common sense, must they send you to that miserable out-of-the-way place for?"

"Our company has been ordered to join a brigade under Taylor's command. You should not wish to see me shirk my duties, would you, mother?" asked Herbert, with a tremor in his voice.

Mrs. Davis had now broken into a passionate fit of weeping. "No, Herbert," she managed to articulate between her sobs. "I want you to act like a man, and a true Southerner. Do all you can to help our dear country; but *do* take care of

your precious life. If you get killed, I shall die, I know I shall!"

"Please do not distress yourself so, dear mother," Herbert said; "I promise you, without compromising my reputation as a soldier, to take the best care of myself."

"I wish you would," replied his mother, somewhat reconciled. Do your duty, Herbert, but please don't rush into the mouths of the cannons, like our Col. Allen did at Shiloh."

"Even then, he didn't get killed, mother."

"No, because he was under God's special protection!" answered Mrs. Davis, with solemn fervency. "Think of his noble conduct at the battle of Baton Rouge; and now, that he has been elected governor, there's no telling what he will do for our state.

At half past ten, most of the household had retired for the night.

Mrs. Davis had done everything that a mother's devotion could suggest for the comfort of a beloved son. The little talk she had had with him, proved very unsatisfactory. Herbert had always been candid and communicative; she was grieved to find him so reserved and unsympathetic. She feared that military life had spoiled his amiable character.

"Herbert, are you asleep?" Rosanna's sweet voice asked at his bed-room door, half an hour after her mother's visit.

"No; come in, sister."

Rosanna found her brother lying at the foot of the bed, with both hands crossed under his head. He had been watching through the open window, the swaying branches of an apple tree which grew in that corner of the house. Some of the smaller twigs had reached the panes, and were now chaffing and tapping against them with weird, shivering sounds,

very much in keeping with the boy's melancholy state of mind.

"I have brought you an infallible cure for a sick headache," explained Rosanna, placing on the table a small china bowl. "Will you try some of it, Herbert?"

"How kind of you, dear sister! of course I will, after you have put yourself to the trouble of preparing it."

Rosanna poured some of the contents of the bowl into a wine-glass and handed it to her patient. After replacing the glass on the table, she returned to her brother's bedside and began passing her fingers carressingly through his wavy brown hair. For a moment both were silent. Herbert's eyes once more wandered back to where the bare limbs struggled with the north wind and threw themselves disconsolately against the weatherboarding.

At length Rosanna asked: "Herbert, my dear brother, what is the matter with you? Surely, it is not a mere headache that makes you so sad and low-spirited!"

"One is not apt to be gay, with a racking pain in the head, sister," observed Herbert, with a forced smile.

"I imagine that you suffer *mentally* more than you do physically, dear Herbert. It takes the eyes of a loving sister to detect the change in you. Could you not trust me, brother, with the secret of your trouble?"

Herbert made no answer to this anxious appeal.

Rosanna proceeded: "Imagine how unhappy I shall be during your long absence, if you leave me in this anxious state of mind."

"Do you ever feel cheerful when you are ill?"

"You are trying to put me off," answered Rosanna, drawing a chair to the bed. "If you were to confide in me, I might be of some assistance to you." She sat beside him

with a determination of finding out the cause of his despondency. After some minutes' reflection, an idea struck her and she asked: "Have you seen Lucile lately?"

The question startled Herbert, but he answered calmly: "Saw her this evening."

"And how is Mrs. Hunt," queried Rosanna.

"I did not see her."

"I should think not, she is still too ill to leave her room."

Herbert raised himself on his elbow and stared at his sister. "Has she been sick?"

"Why, Herbert!" exclaimed Rosanna, with a surprised look. "I cannot believe that Lucile did not mention to you her mother's illness."

Herbert passed his hand across his eyes, like one suddenly overcome by some unexpected calamity. He dearly loved Lucile's mother. He answered evasively: "I was there a very short while; what is the matter with Mrs. Hunt, Rosanna?"

"She was taken with something like a congestive chill and fever; for a time she was alarmingly ill. Lucile sent for me and I helped nurse her mother until she became convalescent. I returned only this morning."

"Then you saw that—that—relative of theirs?" Herbert stammered, at the same time turning his head to hide his confusion.

"Mr. Lafitte left the morning before Mrs. Hunt fell sick, but I had met him before. He is a very nice man, so handsome and agreeable, and every inch a soldier. It's a wonder to me that Lucile did not fall in love with him, in spite of your fine eyes and boyish devotion, brother mine!"

Herbert heaved a deep sigh. "Perhaps she did," he intimated; casting on Rosanna an appealing look.

"The very idea! If Mr. Lafitte ever attempted to make love to Lucile, I know how emphatically she would put a stop to it. She's too whole-souled and conscientious to indulge in even a mild flirtation."

Joy, like a streak of sunlight, flashed across Herbert's soul; but it was instantly dispelled by the recollection of Nannie's remark: "I saw Lucile and her cousin sitting out on the gallery; they reminded me of two pigeons, they were so sweet and affectionate towards each other."

A sharp twinge of jealousy cut him like a knife through the heart, and he spoke almost crossly; "I have no faith in girls; they are all alike; none of them have the strength of mind to resist the pleasure of carrying on flirtations when they have a chance."

"Thanks for the compliment;" answered Rosanna, somewhat nettled; But she obtained a clue to Herbert's ill humor; he was jealous of Lucile's cousin, she felt relieved of very serious apprehensions.

Rising from her seat, she smilingly remarked: "Tomorrow I hope to find you better, and more charitably disposed toward your friends and our sex in general." Then she kissed him "good night," saying: "Dream sweetly of the one you love, dear."

Lucile was nurse and home-keeper during the rest of the week. On the Monday following, her father took her back to school, where she was joyfully welcomed by her teachers and class-mates, for she was a favorite among them all. She and Nannie Dawsey roomed together, and occupied one of the largest apartments on the front. On the first evening after her return, Lucile retired to her room to write an essay which

had been given out for the morrow's exercise. She had hardly settled herself at the table to begin her work, when Nannie walked in and threw herself upon the lounge. Unfortunately for Lucile, the girl had come to talk, for, without the least encouragement, she opened her batteries. Lucile listened very patiently, writing between fires; but it was with the greatest difficulty that she collected her ideas, and scribbled them off at favorable intervals.

"Did Herbert stop at your home, last Wednesday, Lucile?" asked Nannie rather abruptly.

"Yes," was her companion's laconic response. Her face grew pale, and the pen she held wavered across the lines.

"I just knew he would!" exclaimed Nannie, sitting up with renewed interest. "Wasn't he piping mad?"

"He was not in a very amiable frame of mind," affirmed Lucile, with increasing embarrassment. "Why do you ask?"

"Out of curiosity. When he passed here, on his way home, I stopped him to ask for a book, and just for fun, I told him that you and your cousin were head-over-heels in love with each other and that you were just having a jolly time of it."

Lucile leaped from her chair; the light from her eyes blazed like two diamond points. "Nannie!" she cried, in a voice trembling with indignation: "You wicked, meddling little *wretch* you! How *dare* you fabricate such an infamous lie?"

Her girlish figure, graceful even in her extreme wrath, quivered with pain and excitement.

"My goodness!" replied Nannie, somewhat taken by surprise. "Who would have thought you had such an awful temper, Lucile! One would think I had murdered ~~some-~~body!"

"You have done *worse* than murder," cried Lucile, making a few steps toward Nannie; "you have robbed me of Herbert's friendship and esteem; and you have rendered his life miserable, in consequence, because—because—there is nothing in the world, so sad as loss of confidence and blighted faith!"

"Hold on," interrupted Nannie, with a wave of her hand, "if that's all the harm done I can easily settle the matter again. I'll write to Herbert to-morrow and explain the joke."

"'The joke!' O God!" cried Lucile, falling back into her chair and clasping her hands over her face. "The harm you have done can never be repaired, I will *never* forgive Herbert for giving you credit for the tales you told him; *never! never!*" Lucile bowed her head over the table and wept most bitterly.

"There's no use in carrying on so, Lucile;" Nannie remarked, after coolly contemplating her friend's grief for several minutes. "I'll fix it up with Herbert. The first thing you'll know, he'll be on his knees, begging your pardon. I had no idea you'd kick up such a rumpus about such a little thing!"

At Lucile's earnest request, Nannie finally relinquished the office of pacificator.

Three months later, Lucile received from Herbert the following letter:

DEAR LUCILE—I have met your cousin, Lieutenant Latitte. I cannot at present explain to you the preliminaries of our first interview. Suffice it to say, that I am now fully aware, how utterly unworthy I have rendered myself of your thoughts. I am so overwhelmed with the knowledge of the wrong I have done you, that, notwithstanding your Christian

charity, and your angelic nature, I have despaired of ever obtaining your forgiveness. Need I say, that my outrageous and unpardonable conduct towards you, was the outcome of some malicious remarks made by one whom we had both befriended? But I am not trying to vindicate myself, Lucile. I have sinned too deeply to ever recover your friendship. Heaven alone knows how I have suffered, and yet suffer. My miserable condition makes me reckless. I court death—that alone can deliver me from my wretched lot. O Lucile, I have not even the consolation of asking your forgiveness! I dare not. I am weeping those “tears of blood” you predicted I should; but they are profitless tears, they cannot purchase your love, nor, perhaps, even your forgiveness. And yet, how I crave for both, how I pray for them! Is there nothing I could do to wash out this grievous offense of mine, Lucile? For Heaven’s sake, answer me. I cannot much longer endure this terrible suspense.

Let me know the worst, *at once!*

HERBERT.

Lucile received this letter one evening just before supper. She read it at her bed-room window, straining her eyes in the faint light of departing day.

Happily for her, Nannie was absent. She closed her doors and indulged in a blissful fit of weeping. At last, without any concessions on her part, Herbert had discovered his error, and she was once more restored to his good opinion. That he still loved her, was evident from the tenor of his letter. Love like this could never die. She pressed the letter to her lips, and laid it next to her heart, in the place of the heavy weight it had removed.

When Lucile made her appearance at the tea table that evening, her teacher stared at her, saying: “Why, Lucile,

how bright and happy you look! You remind me of your old self."

"The roses deepened on the girl's cheeks. "That's exactly what I am, dear Mrs. Gilbert," she answered with a beaming smile.

After the lapse of a week, Lucile wrote an answer to Herbert's letter.

GROSSE TETE, JUNE, 1864.

Is it Herbert, my school-mate, the companion of my childhood; the fond, noble, trusting friend of my girlhood, who seeks my forgiveness? or that other, whom I can never recall without a cruel pain at the heart. Alas! the Herbert that has erred and suffered, is the one who now claims my commiseration, and to him I must extend my forgiveness. Well, it is given, freely; unreservedly given! I only ask in return, that this same misguided Herbert will, in some manner, so completely identify himself with the other whom I loved and trusted, that I shall one day bless him, for wiping out this *one* dark record from the tablet of my memory. If the restoration of my friendship can lighten your heart, or the hardships of your life, I shall deem myself happy. Now that we are friends again, I shall love to hear from you, whenever you shall have an opportunity to write. LUCILE.

ALEXANDRIA, JUNE 22, 1864.

LUCILE, MY DEAREST LUCILE—How could you have had the heart to write me that letter? You forgave me as a sovereign pardons a criminal! But I forget myself in my new-born joy. I crave for more than I am entitled to, your *pardon*—*nothing more!* O, my dearest one. Will you never forget that wild, irresponsible act of mine? Can you never again respond to my heart's deathless love? I have never ceased to

care for you, Lucile, *never!* Even when my soul was torn with jealousy and disappointment. I could not tear from it my despairing love for you.

You said to me once in that terrible hour, that you had no desire to be restored to my good opinion. Can it be possible that you still adhere to that resolution? Darling, had I loved you less, had I not enshrined you in my heart as the *best, sweetest, purest*, and most perfect of God's creations, I should not have taken it so hard. You know not what I have suffered, Lucile. You know not how dark and desolate the world had suddenly grown to me, after I thought I had lost you. Death would have been the sweetest boon Heaven could have sent me then.

Our regiment will return to Pointe Coupee in a few weeks. I hope you will allow me the privilege of calling upon you, Lucile; I have something to impart to you, which I know will give you pleasure, and which will prove to you, how thoroughly I am cured of that mad, unfounded jealousy which came so near parting us. *Au revoir.*

Yours, ever truly and lovingly.

HERBERT.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON PROBATION.

UNPRECEDENTED struggles had convulsed Louisiana since the opening of the year 1864. The Northwestern portion of the State had become the scene of sanguinary battles, and events of vital interest to the South, had been enacted upon her soil. Death, famine and devastation had followed the wake of the hostile armies which had swept, like an avalanche, across the richest and fairest portion of the country. It was General Halleck who conceived the design of invading Louisiana by the line of the Red river. In the early part of January 1864, he proposed to General Banks, a plan of operation, by which he was to cut off important supplies from Texas, and capture Shreveport, then the capital of the Confederate government in Louisiana.

Accordingly, in the month of March, a strong land force, under Banks, advanced from the valley of the Teche towards Red river, where he was to be supported by a fleet of gunboats under the command of Admiral Porter. General Steele marching from Little Rock was to co-operate with these united forces at Shreveport. Taylor, who had the immediate direction of the troops in Louisiana, contrived, with his little army of ten thousand men, to keep this formidable host in check until reinforcements reached him. The first important engagement took place near Mansfield. Taylor and his gallant

Louisianans, assisted by several regiments of fearless Texans, won the day and covered themselves with deathless glory. The next encounter was at Plaisant Hill, where General Green and his dauntless Texas cavalry, distinguished themselves for their brilliant exploits. The day after the battle, he was sent with a detachment in pursuit of the fugitives, and was killed by a blow from a fragment of a shell. Lieutenant Lafitte had followed his bold leader, and was severely wounded whilst valiantly rallying his squad near Blair's landing. Herbert Davis, who had joined the pursuit, received several painful flesh wounds. After the fray, he and Eugene Lafitte found themselves under the same roof of an improvised field hospital. While waiting for the arrival of the surgeon, Herbert caught sight of his quondam rival lying on a pile of hay, bleeding copiously from a wound in his thigh. Though this man had been the indirect cause of his outbreak with Lucile, Herbert was too sympathetic and noble-minded to encourage unkind feelings towards his suffering comrade in the hour of peril. Walking up to where the officer was, he stooped over his prostrate form and asked: "Can I do anything for you, Lieutenant Lafitte?"

The soldier's bronzed face flushed with surprise and emotion.

"I do not think it possible for you to render me any assistance," he answered, "unless you can find some way of staunching this blood. It looks as though I shall bleed to death before I can be attended to."

Herbert made a tour of inspection through the deserted building, and found to his relief, the remnant of a table cloth in an old cypress armoire. This he quickly made into a compress. He then expertly bandaged the leg, unmindful of the pain he himself suffered from a gaping wound on his arm.

An hour later, the surgeon complimented Herbert on his dexterity and timely succor. From that day, a close friendship united the worthy youths. They remained together several weeks after the dispersion of the troops that had done such valiant service in behalf of the Pelican State. The men whom General Taylor had so thoroughly inspired with his own fiery zeal, now refused to follow Kirby Smith across the Texan lines. After Taylor's return to Natchitoches, they became demoralized and were disbanded. Many of the regiments rejoined their former commands. As the wound in his thigh incapacitated young Lafitte from further service, Herbert Davis prevailed on him to return with him to Pointe Coupee, to remain as his father's guest until he was once more qualified for military duties.

On a bright morning in the flowery month of June, Mrs. Gilbert, the minister's wife, sat in the parlor of the Fordorche home, giving a music lesson. The sound of jingling spurs arrested her attention, then some one walked rapidly up the steps. She went to the door to ascertain who the caller was, and came face to face with Herbert Davis. He had always been a favorite of hers. His uniform courtesy, gentlemanly deportment and assiduous application to his studies, had won her interest and esteem; his gallant conduct in the late campaign, had served to increase her admiration. The meeting between the two was, therefore, cordial and affectionate. After a brief and earnest conversation and mutual inquiries of personal interest, Herbert respectfully drew the lady out of the hearing of the pupil, who, according to orders, was running her scales from the majors to the minors, but with such reckless velocity that her teacher turned several times to reprimand her. "Dear Mrs. Gilbert" he said, "I have a favor to ask of you."

"Granted;" thoughtlessly answered his old teacher. "Who could deny you anything, Herbert—and at such a time?"

Herbert gave her a look full of gratitude. "Have you any objections to my seeing Lucile for a few minutes?"

"None whatever. You have not outgrown the old attachment, I perceive;" the lady smilingly observed.

"Indeed no; and you are the last person in the world to discountenance my allegiance, I am sure."

Mrs. Gilbert gave Herbert an approving glance, and drew out her watch. "Will you have the patience to wait ten minutes?" she asked.

"After a separation of six months, I should be equal to the ordeal;" answered Herbert, with cheerful alacrity.

"Very well. I shall send you Lucile as soon as I get through with this lesson. Here's a seat; you will enjoy the balmy air, and the merry warble of that mocking-bird in the catalpa."

"Thanks. What a lovely view you have here! There is no finer country in the world, than Grosse Tete, Mrs. Gilbert;" exclaimed Herbert, with a glad light in his eyes.

The lady laughed: "I can well appreciate your feelings, dear Herbert. The most attractive place on earth to any one in love, is where the heart finds its magnet."

As the minutes sped, Herbert's heart began to beat so violently, that his lips vibrated with the force of its pulsations. Lucile, to his sorrow and disappointment, received him with less warmth than he anticipated; indeed, she was inclined to treat him with dignified reserve. "Dear Lucile," Herbert cried, impulsively seizing her hands. "I see you are still angry with me. I never thought you could be so heartless. O! my dearest one, will you never forgive me—will you never love me again?" he asked, with a note of entreaty in his voice.

Lucile silently struggled to free her hands from his clinging clasp.

"Herbert, you hurt me!" she exclaimed, in a voice tremulous with emotion. "Release my hands, you know full well, you have not the right to treat me thus, it is ungenerous on your part."

Herbert instantly released the little hands: "Very well. I shall not again run the risk of incurring your displeasure, Lucile."

He had grown very pale with suppressed pain and mortification. Unconsciously, he threw himself in the same attitude he had assumed a half a year ago, whilst upbraiding her. Then, the intellectual beauty of his face was marred by passion and his soul writhed in despair. But now, the developed faculties of his heart and mind, asserted themselves, and he was taller, manlier, handsomer than before. The Confederate uniform he wore, displayed to advantage his graceful, well-proportioned figure, and lent him a distinguished appearance. For a moment he held her eyes enthralled by a magnetic glance of his own; they pierced her soul with the truth and sincerity of his abiding love.

"Lucile," he asked, "is this to be the end of our friendship, and of the engagement which existed before that one grievous act of mine alienated us? I have the privilege of ascertaining your intentions and views in regard to our former relation to each other. You must now let me know, positively, whether you still consider me your betrothed lover. Be not over-hasty; remember, dearest one, that your love is more precious to me than life."

A gleam of rosy light broke upon Lucile's perfect face; almost involuntarily she raised her eyes to his, but she could

not hide the truth from her lover, he read it in their liquid depths.

"You *do* care for me, Lucile," he cried, once more grasping her hands and covering them with kisses. "What pleasure can you derive in thus torturing my poor heart?"

"Had I ever said an unkind word to you before you mistrusted me, Herbert?" Lucile asked, gently disengaging her hands; "you must now suffer the consequences of your loss of confidence in me."

"I shall prove to you, my unshaken faith in you, Lucile. I have persuaded Lieutenant Lafitte to remain with me as my guest until he is able to return to his regiment."

"Does he still suffer from the wound in his arm?" asked Lucile, looking frankly and unperturbably into Herbert's face.

"No, he was severely hurt in a fight at Blair's Landing. Now, Lucile, it will be but natural for him to spend much of his time at your house; he will be constantly thrown with you. I shall not be jealous of him, if you give me one more trial; renew the promise you gave me, just before I started for the army."

Lucile broke out in a pretty, rippling laugh.

"I shall do no such a thing, Herbert; you have shouldered the responsibility, you must now take the risks."

Herbert bit his lips with vexation, a misgiving, subtle as air, clouded for a moment his anxious countenance.

"Then, I have made a fool of myself!"

"Not quite, Herbert;" said Lucile, with a charming smile. "You have only prolonged your probation."

CHAPTER XXV.

LAWLER'S INVASION.

THE Federals had recently established a military post at Morganza, and General Lawler, with a considerable army, had taken up his headquarters in that vicinity. Consequently, Grosse Tete and the adjacent country became the scene of frequent conflicts between the Yankee troops and the Confederate soldiers occupying that part of the parish. Oft times our boys ventured out to a close proximity to the Federal encampment, "just for the fun of popping at the centries."

Then again, they met in sharp skirmishes, resulting in serious losses on both sides. The dash and daring of these reiterated attacks on the part of the Rebels, became monotonous and wearisome to the good-natured, pusillanimous commander at Morganza, his Irish blood was up and he would no longer brook their insolence and perverseness. He had several times threatened to put a stop to the reckless audacity of these free lances, by making a *sortie* and scourging them entirely out of the country. About a week after the return of our troops from Red River, some one started the report that Lawler had definitely decided on a little expedition down N'ordorche. Had the general notified our boys that he had granted them an amnesty, and was coming to give them a picnic, the tidings would have been less elating.

They immediately began preparing for his reception. Officers mustered into service all the scattered companies hovering around, and as many recruits as were willing to join the ranks.

On a sunny morning in June, the dauntless little band gathered at the mouth of Fordoche, impatiently awaiting for the signal to start. Four of the pupils of the neighboring school exchanged their school-bags for muskets; they were mere lads, between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. Willie Gresham, Corine's brother, was the oldest of the absconding quartette. He was noted for being the handsomest youth in the country. His fair and delicate complexion, his coral lips and soft, dark eyes, had already wrought sad havoc in the hearts of the grown girls.

Willie was a born aristocrat; was always arrayed in broad-cloth and immaculate linen, and sported a two hundred-dollar jeweled watch. These worldly advantages, however, never detracted from his popularity. His facile, attractive nature won him many friends. It was a wonder to everyone that adulation had not spoilt his character; he was uniformly kind and amiable towards all his school-mates and they all loved him dearly for his artless, careless patronage. Notwithstanding the effeminacy of his manners and delicate constitution, Willie Gresham was the moving spirit of a little war council held on this eventful morning, in the extreme corner of the school-house yard. He was the chief speaker, and the one who expounded certain views regarding the duties and responsibilities of every Southern man or boy capable of bearing arms. The result of this patriotic effusion was the surreptitious disappearance of the school's most promising lads. They were heartily welcomed in the ranks, and concealed until the troops were ready to depart. This little transaction took place about

half an hour before the bell rang for morning classes. The pupils were then assembled about the yard, watching the soldiers as they passed and repassed in their hurried preparations for an early start. Every one was on the alert; a spirit of restlessness had seized and demoralized the whole school. The younger boys stood on the road and greeted with vociferous cheers, each Confederate squad riding by. Whenever a civilian came in sight, his ears were instantly assailed by a loud chorus of voices singing a paraphrase on "I Leave My Home and Thee, Dear."

"Why don't you go to the war, dear?
Why don't you fight for me?
Why don't you drive the Yankees
From out of Pointe Coupee?"

The girls sat under the spreading trees, or promenaded on the gallery, waiting for the departure of the valiant little band rapidly gathering under the folds of their "Bonnie Blue Flag," fluttering in the cheerful morning light. When the last rider had disappeared from view, and the inspiring strains of "Dixie" had floated off across the neighboring fields, Mr. Gilbert summoned his reluctant pupils to the school house. But he found it almost impossible to control them; they were restless and averse to study. The morning exercises were so often interrupted, and proved so unsatisfactory, that the teachers concluded to dismiss the school at an earlier hour than usual, in order to give time to the day scholars to reach their homes before the culmination of that day's event.

As the laggard hours dragged apace, a prescience of coming evil overshadowed the minds of the inmates of the school, and filled them with vague apprehensions for those who had so unnecessarily exposed their lives on that hazardous adventure. Day was declining and the sun was moving rapidly towards a couch of diaphanous clouds prepared for him on the verge

of the western horizon. His golden beams showered down upon tree tops, grassy banks and flowery fields. The twittering of young swallows among the shrubbery and the drowsy hum of belated bees alone broke the silence—a silence which hung like a tangible weight upon the senses, and oppressed the heart with painful forebodings.

The boarders had spent an idle evening. Several of them had taken their seats upon the side gallery, where they had an uninterrupted view of the Fordoche road. With straining eyes and deep solicitude, they watched for the returning braves. After many hours of anxious waiting the cries of; “Here they are! They are coming! They are coming!” broke simultaneously from their lips.

In fact the road along Bayou Fordoche, was flecked with riders in grey. Helter skelter they came, clattering by in a promiscuous stampede.

“What’s got into them?” asked one of the girls.

“The Yankees are after them;” sententiously answered Nannie Dawsey.

A vehicle was now plainly discernable in the mêlée; then another emerged in view; both slowly wended their way amongst the galloping horses.

“They are bringing home their disabled men,” observed Mrs. Gilbert.

“Look!” cried one of the boarders. “That fellow over there has his head bandaged, I can see the red stains on the cloth, and there’s another all splashed with blood.”

Some of the men continued down the road, others halted at the mouth of the bayou.

“I’ve a great notion to run out and ask them the news;” said Nannie, starting off. One of her companions caught her

by the arm. "For shame, Nannie. Don't you see Mr. Gilbert out there? he'll give us the necessary information."

"They've got Herbert in there I'm sure;" exclaimed Nannie, when one of the vehicles slowly passed the house; "for I saw him pass here this morning in one of the squads."

All eyes turned toward Lucile. Though the color had fled from her cheeks, she gave no utterance to the dreadful suspicion clutching at her heart.

"Oh, goodness! cried one of the girls. Mr. Gilbert is bringing us bad news. Look at his face, it is almost livid." As soon as the minister set foot on the gallery, the group closed around him with eager questions. The tidings he brought, were truly disheartening. As was expected, our over-confident soldiers had had an encounter with a greatly superior force, and after a gallant, though unavailing resistance, had been totally defeated.

"Our poor Willie Gresham was shot through the lung and was brought home in a dying condition," said Mr. Gilbert. Here he paused and glanced at Lucile, who was staring at him with a wild haunted look in her eyes. "We have been very unfortunate," he continued, turning to his wife. "Herbert Davis also, received a dangerous wound in his chest."

"In the chest?" exclaimed Nannie. "Then he's gone up!"

Many of the girls drew out their handkerchiefs and began crying. A breathless sob rose to Lucile's white lips, and she stretched out her hand towards a chair like one suddenly stricken with blindness. At the sight of her distress, Mrs. Gilbert passed an arm around the shuddering form and drew it affectionately to her bosom.

"One of the officers," continued Mr. Gilbert, "just now told me that a large body of Federals is on the way to Grosse Tete. It is probable they will reach this point before nightfall.

A flutter of excitement disturbed the little group congregated around their teachers.

"There is no cause for alarm, young ladies," pursued Mr. Gilbert, in a reassuring voice. "The Yankees will not disturb us, for they have made up their minds to chase our soldiers out of the parish, and will not stop to give us a moment's thought; besides we shall put our trust in God. 'Whosoever dwelleth under the defense of the Most-High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty,' " concluded the reverend gentleman with much fervor.

"Suppose they stop here, what are we to do?" asked one of the pupils in a tearful voice.

"Lock yourselves up in your rooms and make the best of your situation. Mrs. Gilbert will give us supper as soon as convenient so that you may not go to bed hungry. After supper, we shall have prayers. I perceive you are in no condition for mental exertion, we shall, therefore, dispense with our usual preparations for the morrow's lessons."

Half an hour later, whilst the household were hastily partaking of the evening meal, their attention was arrested by the beat of hoofs on the front alley; then the silence was broken by the call.

"Hello there! Hello!" Mr. Gilbert went to the door; he caught a glimpse of a rider plainly outlined against the twilight; the man reeled in his seat like one either badly wounded or intoxicated. He drew reins at the corner of the steps.

"What is your business?" demanded Mr. Gilbert, in a rather uncompromising tone of voice. "Come up close, I want to speak to you on very important business," answered the intruder. With evident reluctance, Mr. Gilbert walked to the edge of the gallery saying, "Well what do you want of

me?" A click, a flash, and the Yankee's revolver was leveled at the clergyman's breast.

"Your life, sir; or your money!" came the answer in a low, tense voice.

Naturally, Mr. Gilbert was staggered by the unexpected assault. He grew ghastly pale and held his breath, like one in fearful suspense.

"I have no money, sir;" he said in a trembling voice. "I am only a poor clergyman, teaching for living."

"None of that nonsense," replied the robber, with a fearful oath. "It's one or the other, and I'll not give you another minute for reflection; choose!"

He enunciated the last word with an ominous contraction of his shaggy eye-brows and brought his formidable looking weapon in closer contact with the heaving breast. At this juncture, Mrs. Gilbert rushed to her husband's rescue. "For God's sake spare my husband;" she cried. "I will give you all you ask." "All right;" answered the man, with a sardonic grin. "Hand over all your cash, or—here another terrible oath burst from his lips, "I'll bore him through. Now, hustle. I give you three minutes, and no more.

It took the frightened woman less than that to run to the amoir and back again with a roll of greenbacks which she tremblingly thrust into the highwayman's hands. He seized the booty without examination, and wheeled his horse around with nervous expedition. In the twinkling of an eye, he had passed the gate, and was on his way up the road, followed by several others who were, no doubt, his accomplices in crime. The scurry of their horses' hoofs, had scarcely died away, when the billowy noise of tramping cavalry smote the ear.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mrs. Gilbert. "The Federals are upon us!" Retire to your rooms young ladies, and lock your doors."

Though trembling with terror and excitement, the girls still lingered on the gallery, peering through the obscurity, at the dark, cumbrous mass moving along on the opposite shore. The clatter of horses' feet, the clinking and gingle of sabres and rumbling of wagons, produced an appalling sound. Then, regiment after regiment of cavalry thundered across the little bridge, at the mouth of Fordoche. It required considerable time for a army of four thousand men to get across. By eight o'clock that night, the premises were alive with hungry, restless men, running from place to place, tearing down fences and wood-piles to light their camp-fires. There was not a nook in the yard and garden that was not in possession of the enemy. The banks of the bayous, the roads and surrounding fields, were all illuminated with their direful beacons. The crash of falling fences, the death-squawk of fowls, surprised in peaceful slumber, the neighing and tramping of horses, and the sound of a thousand muffled voices, filled the air with a dull roar and a din that conflicted strangely with each other.

General Lawler and his staff came up to the house, and signified his intention of making it his headquarters for the night. As he could not be accommodated with necessary apartments, he and his officers made up their minds to sleep on their blankets out on the gallery. The General then ordered Mrs. Gilbert to prepare supper for himself and staff, after which he lighted his cigar, and settled down in pleasant anticipations of a sumptuous meal and uninterrupted repose.

The girls had taken refuge in Lucile's room; the doors and blinds had been securely fastened, but they stood behind them, and peeped through the turned shutters, at the busy scene outside. Some of the timid boarders began crying and lamenting, others giggled and pretended to be highly entertained. Poor Lucile had thrown herself upon the bed and

buried her face in a pillow. The noise, confusion and excitement prevailing around her, produced no effect on her senses. They were as completely closed against her surroundings, as though she belonged to another sphere. Without effort on her part, her mind called up and realized the heart-rending scene transpiring at Herbert's home. In imagination, she witnessed the despair and voiceless anguish of the stricken family, on the arrival of that beloved son and brother, so sadly smitten in the dawn of his promising career. But what was their anguish to hers?

None of them had ever wounded his sensitive feelings, or caused him to shed a tear, whilst *she*, in her stubborn pride, had humiliated him beyond measure, and had filled his poor heart with grief and discouragement. She would now gladly forfeit ten years of her life for a sight of his dear face, and the assurance of his forgiveness. She accused herself of being the most heartless creature on the face of the earth, and promised God that if He spared Herbert's life, she would, never again, in word or deed, inflict suffering upon any one. "Dear, dear Herbert;" she muttered to herself. "If you knew how I love you, if you knew how deeply I repent of my harshness towards you, you would not die, I am sure you would not! My poor heart is tortured with remorse, but I cannot go to you, Herbert; something stronger than this army around me, holds me back. Call me, dear One! call me, that I may go to you before you die. My noble, generous, beautiful Herbert, do not leave me thus; have pity on my suffering!"

Such were the grievous and silent prayers and appeals which rose from Lucile's bleeding heart and died upon her lips. Her condition rendered her oblivious of even the presence of her companions, who had gotten over their fright, and were now laughing and struggling for the best post of obser-

vation. Thinking that Lucile had cried herself to sleep, they ceased to worry her with their officious, though well-meant attentions, and confined themselves to the novel proceedings viewed through the slats of the doors and windows. At about ten o'clock that evening, Lucile was aroused from her sad meditations by Nannie's shrill voice calling: Lucile! Lucile! wake up quick! here's your Pa, big as life, walking straight for the steps!"

*In a thrice, Lucile bounded off the bed, and rushed to the door which she wrenched open. She ran through the parlor and reached the gallery, just as her father stepped upon it. With a smothered cry, she flung her arms, protectingly around her father's neck.

"Halt! halt!—treachery!" The words rang from the lips of half a dozen men, who sprang from their seats and covered Mr. Hunt with drawn swords and revolvers.

"What does this signify?" demanded General Lawler, staring about him with a look of surprise and consternation. "Speak sir."

For answer Mr. Hunt glanced down on the white-robed figure clinging convulsively to his bosom. Lucile withdrew her eyes from her father's pale face, and cast a hasty, terrified look at the glittering muzzles leveled at his heart. She tightened her arms around him, and wailed: "Papa! O Papa!" There was an undescribable pathos in the low, sweet voice, which thrilled the hearts of her hearers and disarmed them of suspicion. As the actual condition of things dawned upon their bewildered minds, the panic-stricken officers lowered their weapons, and the color slowly flowed back to their blanched cheeks.

* A true incident.

"How did you manage to pass our pickets?" sternly asked the general.

"I had no encounter with your pickets, sir."

"Ah! Where do you live?"

"About eight miles from here."

The general scowled. "Do you mean to tell me that you passed our lines and marched up to my headquarters without interference?" asked he with an incredulous look.

Mr. Hunt appreciated the officer's dismay, and answered with a smile: "I travelled on the other side of the bayou and crossed it in a skiff, opposite the house. Your guards must have been asleep; none of them attempted to stop me, as you perceive."

"We shall postpone the examination of this case till to-morrow," said Lawler after a moment's reflection. "In the meantime, sir, consider yourself our prisoner."

Mr. Hunt bowed in acquiescence, then led Lucile into the house without the least opposition, on the part of his detainer. Mrs. Gilbert who had witnessed the whole performance from the dining-room, declared that she had never seen as tragic and beautiful a tableau as the one presented on this occasion. The space on the gallery in front of the door, was sufficiently lighted up by the parlor lamps, to bring in relief, the expression, dress, accouterments of each individual figuring in the scene. No performance on the stage, could have produced the dramatic effect that this unconscious and spontaneous acting did, upon the few astonished spectators.

As soon as the general and his staff had adjourned to the dining-room for supper, Mr. Hunt prevailed upon Mr. Gilbert to allow the girls to go out on the galleries to look at the camp; a spectacle they might never witness again.

The flickering camp-fires, still illuminating the grounds, presented the grandest and most wonderful sight they had ever looked upon. Some of the restless torches leaped upwards, as if to meet the kindred light of the stars, and then, like disappointed ambition, suddenly dropped among the smoldering embers. Others burned with a steadier light, throwing a rosy glow upon the forms moving within the radiance. The bustling noise and confusion which deafened the air in the earlier portion of the evening, had nearly subdued, and a solemn hush was gradually falling upon that breathing human mass, slumbering beneath the starry canopy of heaven. As the little group on the gallery contemplated the spectacle, one of their number remarked: "Just think of it, girls, one among these, fired the bullet which killed poor Willie Gresham."

Lucile started, and shielded her face with her hands. Her father silently drew her back into the parlor.

The boarders were then sent to bed. They had been so exhausted by that day's fatigue and excitement, that they slept profoundly until sunrise, when the bugle for *veille*, pierced the air with its clear ringing notes, and aroused them from their slumbers. Once again the fires were kindled, and the noise and bustle and tumult, agitated the camp. Mr. Hunt was not permitted to leave the premises until after the departure of the troops, which took place immediately after breakfast. The girls were given the privilege of standing on the galleries to watch the regiments, as one by one, they unfurled their spangled banners and marched off, accompanied by the swell of martial music. Then, Lucile, with a cry of anguish, threw herself into her father's arms. "Take me home, papa," she begged, "I cannot bear it another minute! Something dreadful has happened; I know it! I feel it!"

Mr. Hunt borrowed the minister's horse and buggy, and started off without further delay.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FAITHFUL UNTIL DEATH.

"When sorrows come, they come not as single spies, but in battalions."

EUGENE LAFITTE had been staying with Herbert since his return to Pointe Coupee. Two days previous to that unfortunate Fordoche expedition, he had come on a special visit to his cousins at "Highland." The news of the Confederates' defeat and its results, reached the family about a half an hour before Herbert and his escort passed the house. Mr. Lafitte and Mr. Hunt accompanied the party home, in order to lend assistance in this deplorable emergency. Before starting, however, Mr. Hunt took the initiative in dispatching several messengers for medical aid. When the doctor arrived, he found Herbert in a critical condition. The ball had penetrated the right lung just above the abdomen; he had already lost a considerable amount of blood and suffered acutely during the paroxysms of coughing. The physician deemed it prudent to await the arrival of the surgeon before attempting to extricate the ball. The latter had been called for Willie Gresham, but his services were no longer needed, as the youth had died from hemorrhage soon after his removal from the conveyance.

In the meantime, Mr. Hunt's anxieties for Lucile became unendurable, and he represented to his friends the necessity of going for her before the arrival of the invading troops. He took the precaution of crossing the bayou in order to avoid the Yankee pickets, in case they had already been stationed along

the road. We have already seen the result of his rash undertaking. Mr. Hunt had left his wife in charge of two trusty servants—Zulma and Plaisance. He took his departure without the least misgiving, for he had not the remotest idea that the Federals would venture as far as his neighborhood that night. But he was sadly mistaken in his calculations, for he had not been absent an hour, when the tramp of horses' hoofs was heard clamorously crossing the bridge at the foot of the hill.

Zulma, who was out in the *parterre* watching for the return of the messenger that had been sent to Mr. Davis', ran to her mistress with unusual trepidation in her manners.

"Mistis," she cried, "sho' as you born, dem's Yankees gallopin' up de road!"

"Oh no, Zulma," answered Mrs. Hunt in a reassuring tone of voice. "Those are some of our men, returning from Fordoche."

"Listen!" once more cried the girl, with a frightened expression in her black eyes. "Dey dun turn de road; no Confederites would come tearing so at dis time of de night. Come in, please, mistis, come in!"

As the riders drew near, Zulma's agitation augmented, and she once more appealed to Mrs. Hunt: "Mistis, go to your room and lock yo'self up. I kin manage dem fellers better den you. You know I ain't skeered of nobody." Seeing that her mistress was not disposed to obey her, Zulma became desperate: "Fur God sake, mistis," she pleaded, "do as I tell you. You ain't got no men folks tur hinder dem tellers frum 'busin' and cusin' you. Marster dun lef' you in my hands an' you got ter do as I tell you; fur dis once, please, mistis. I ain't a bit skeered of dem men. I'll straighten 'em up. mighty quick, if you leave 'em ter me. Now, do, mistis!"

Whilst thus pleading and expostulating, Zulma impelled her reluctant mistress towards her own room, and firmly pushed her in, saying: "Annt Plaise, you stay in dere wid her. Lock de door inside, and don't let her open it 'till I tell you."

Zulma then rushed to the front doors and began fastening them. She had scarcely closed the last, when several Yankees rode up and began shouting. The girl kept quiet for several minutes, but the men grew so boisterous and violent that she thought it prudent to conciliate them by civil treatment. She ran to Mrs. Hunt's room, and said in cautious tones: "I'se gwine ter let 'em in, mistis. Dey'll bust open de door and cum in any way, if I don't. Don't you be skeered. I'se gwine ter treat 'em as perlite as I kin, cause dis ain't no time ter fool wid 'em; you understand, mistis?"

"Yes, Zulma," answered Mrs. Hunt in a trembling voice. "Let them in; but 'tis best fer me to go out there and receive them; they will respect me and abstain from violence. Plaisance, give me that key."

"O my goodness!" cried Zulma. "Please don't give it to her Aunt Plaisance—t'row it out of de window! Dey's tryin' to break open dat door—I'se gwine."

"You little hussy!" exclaimed one of the soldiers, flourishing his sword over Zulma's head. "What did you keep us waiting so long for?"

Zulma looked unflinchingly into his ferocious eyes. "You was in a mighty big hurry, sur; I was opening as fas' as I could."

"That's a d— lie. You were hiding the folks or something—you little traitor! Say, where's the boss of this she-bang?"

"He's gone off a little piece," answered Zulma hesitatingly. "He'll be back after awhile."

She hoped to intimidate the ruffians by the sly insinuation that her master had gone for re-inforcements, but she was disappointed; the man broke into an incredulous laugh.

"The coward! He's taken to the swamps and won't be back here before broad daylight, you bet."

He said this to his companions, but turning to Zulma, once more, asked: "And where's the women folks? Have they put out too?"

"Yes, sur, dey've gone too," answered Zulma, with a sinking heart.

"By jove! then we'll just take possession" cried the desperado, throwing himself in one of the hall chairs. "See here girl, we're the masters here and you've got to wait on us. Bring us all the whiskey you've got in the house, first thing."

"My marstar don't make use of sich stuff," answered Zulma, with rising anger. "He drink nuffin but wine, an' he ain't got none lef'."

"Thunder and lightning! he hasn't? Then haul out the money; he has lots of that, I know, for he's been squeezing it out of you niggers for the last fifty years, I reckon. We've heard that these d— Southerners keep gold by the barrellful. Where is it?"

"My goodness!" exclaimed Zulma. "You take money fur dirt! If my marstar got sich lots of it, I niver laid eyes on it."

"Then, we'll hunt it up—nothing easier. Come on boys!" cried the leader, starting from his chair. His followers needed no second invitation, and began the search by rushing into the parlor.

"I'm sure it is not here;" remarked one of them, lifting the candle, and taking a critical survey of the elegant furniture in the reception room. Lucile's was the next apartment

desecrated by their presence. Here, they fell to work—pulling out drawers and scattering their contents over the floor. Then, they broke open her armoire. When Zulma saw them tossing out Lucile's gowns and shawls and laces, she ran to them in a tremor of excitement and indignation.

"Stop dat, now!" she exclaimed, in a choking voice. "Dat's my little mistis' things, an' you aint gwine ter pitch 'em out as if dey was no 'count rags. You shan't!" And she began picking up the garments and other articles, muttering her displeasure, and wiping away the tears which sprang to her eyes, notwithstanding the effort she made to keep them back. While thus busily occupied, one of the Yankees gave a tremendous blow to the door opposite Lucile's room. Zulma screamed and started towards it with a bound.

"Git out! You aint got no business in yere!"

"D— you," cried the Yankee. "Open the door!"

"Dey's nobody in dere but a sick lady, an' I ain't gwine ter let you in;" answered Zulma, standing with her back against the door and fixing her shining eyes, with a look of savage determination, on the brute. "I ain't gwine ter move from yere, if you *kill* me!"

"We'll see about that—you ugly imp, you," said the man seizing her by the shoulders and flinging her aside. Zulma was back to her post in a second. Then followed a desperate and prolonged scuffle between the strong and agile girl and her drunken antagonist. Zulma's quick ear had detected a commotion within and heard some one tampering with the lock, the circumstance increased her terror and anxiety to keep the villanous wretch from entering the apartment. "Please, sur," she said, in a tearful voice, "my poor mistis is very bad off; if you keep on skeerin' her, you'll kill her; indeed, you will!"

"I don't care a d— if I do," he answered, looking around. Say one of you boys come here, and hold this nigger 'till I burst open this infernal lock."

As he drew out his revolver, Zulma screamed out: "Git ont de way, mistis, he's gwine ter shoot!"

The warning was scarcely out of her mouth when a loud report accompanied by a heart-rending shriek, shivered the air.

The door flew open, and Zulma, enveloped in a cloud of smoke, fell back in the arms of her mistress.

The Yankee stared for a minute at the spectacle—his eyes riveted on his victim with an expression of fear and horror.

"I didn't mean to do it," he said; "the fool thing threw herself between me and the lock, just as I fired. I'm sure I'm not to blame." Then, turning to his companions, he said: "Let's hustle out of here, boys; this little game settles our business. Come on."

Neither Plaisance nor Mrs. Hunt noticed the remark, or the sudden disappearance of the men; their thoughts were concentrated on the palpitating form which lay between them.

"O heavens!" cried Mrs. Hunt; "they have killed her outright! Zulma, dear child, speak to me; tell me what I can do for you."

The dying girl lifted her eyes and fixed them with a pleading, piteous look upon her mistress.

"Help me up, please, mistis;" she said in a faltering voice. "Don't let me die."

The effort she made brought on a hemorrhage, which flowed in a crimson tide through the fingers of the white hand pressing impotently against the gaping wound. Zulma coughed and gasped for breath. "O Lord! I'm dyin' sho' 'nough, mistis; keep me frum it—till—till—I see—Miss—Lucile,"

Fix your thoughts on God, dear Zulma;" cried Mrs. Hunt, with a look of anguish. "Ask Him to accept your life in expiation of your sins, and to receive you in Heaven."

"You'd better—speak to Him—yo'self, 'bout dat—mistis; I—can't—wid all dis blood—spoutin' out 'er me!"

Mrs. Hunt groaned aloud, and bent once more over the sufferer's face. "Yes, Zulma, I will help you; but you must pray yourself, and repeat after me the prayers I shall say with you. Do you understand me? Can you follow me, dear Zulma?"

"Yes, my mistis," answered Zulma, with a sob. I knows—you'll—take me—straight to Jesus." She then repeated in broken accents, several touching aspirations after her mistress; during the time, she kept her eyes fixed helplessly to the lips which tremblingly formed them. Her heart heaved painfully, and several large tears rolled down her cheeks as she said: "I—want—to—see—Miss Lucile—aint—she—comin'?"

"Yes, lie quietly; she will come directly—your master has gone for her—but dear Zulma, while you're waiting, keep your thoughts on God, and on our Saviour who died to save us, you remember, Zulma?"

"Yes—Miss Lucile—dun tole me—all—'bout Jesus."

She uttered the last words with painful difficulty drawing her respiration in short, spasmodic gasps. It was evident that her life was rapidly ebbing away with the torrents of blood that flowed from the fearful wound in her side. Her head rested against Mrs. Hunt's bosom. Plaisance, who helped to support her, kneeled on the floor and watched with dilating eyes, the painful convulsions of the dying girl.

"Mistress," she whispered in French, can't you hold her by yourself till I go out there and ring the plantation bell?

We are here by ourselves and must have somebody to help us, you know."

Mrs. Hunt shuddered, and answered in a plaintive voice: "Oh! no, no; not now, Plaisance. Do not disturb her in her last moments; let her spirit depart in peace. Pray, rather, that God, in His mercy, may accept the life she has so generously given away. Though Zulma's respiration was hardly perceptible, she made another attempt to speak. Mrs. Hunt brought her ear in close contact with the twitching mouth, in order to catch the sense of the words, it vainly strove to convey. Only a moan fretted the stiffening lips; the chill of death was upon her. The eyelids quivered; the long lashes fell heavily upon the ashen cheeks. The spirit that had never been released from earthly bondage, now accepted from its Maker immortal Life and Freedom.

"You may go and ring the bell;" said Mrs. Hunt, in a calm, unfaltering voice; "no earthly sound will ever again disturb her slumber!" And then, as if suddenly and forcibly reminded of her irreparable loss, and the desolate void left by Zulma's death, she drew the insensible body to her breast and broke into convulsive sobs. "O Zulma!" she cried, gazing on the still, unconscious face. "Good and faithful friend! what shall we do without you? Your presence has for so long cheered our home; your devotion has so often sustained us in hours of trial; your poor little hands were always so ready to smooth out the rough places in our path, and to remove from it the sharp stones, and when we were ill or suffering, you knew it even in your sleep—O Zulma—dear dead, lost, Zulma! And to think that *death* should be the price of this life-long, unheard-of devotion! The thought is unbearable! Plaisance, how are we to break the news to Lucile? she who is already afflicted on Herbert's account. It will kill her; her poor sensitive heart will never stand the shock.

Oh, don't lay her down like a dead dog, Plaisance, get a pillow off the bed. Now, help me to remove these clothes, I am weltering in blood. The sight is enough to make one crazy. Look at that pool near the door! The stain can never be washed away. It will remain there as a pledge of Zulma's undying devotion to our family. "Poor, dear young martyr! May God grant you a blissful eternal Life for the one you have so generously sacrificed for me!"

Zulma was laid out in her own room at the end of the back gallery—one which had been allotted to her, when the family first moved to the house. Lucile had undertaken to furnish and decorate it. The neat bed, the table, the wash-stand with its bowl and pitcher; the looking-glass and chairs, were all gifts from the different members of the family. The walls were covered with crayon sketches of Lucile's; with bits of scenery from her brush, and gaudy fashion plates, tastefully framed by her deft, artistic hands

Although exhausted from the effects of the terrible ordeal she had undergone within the last twelve hours, Mrs. Hunt superintended all the preparations for Zulma's burial. No expense was spared, and nothing withheld that was needed for the occasion. The brightest and sweetest of flowers had been ströwn on her snowy garment and laid against her face, now settled in eternal slumber.

That serene expression and inscrutable smile so often seen hovering about dead lips, rendered her face as beautiful as sculptured ebony. The poor hands, once so eager and helpful, now clasped to her peaceful breast, a cluster of "Cloth of Gold." The creamy petals of the roses, and the subtle sweetness of their odor, seemed like her own soul, purified, and escaping from its prison of clay.

The next morning after the terrible tragedy, Dave started on his journey to meet his master, in order to apprise him of the night's occurrences. He had not ridden many miles, when some one informed him that the Federals had extended their pickets a mile above Fordoche and none were permitted to cross the lines.

Thus frustrated in his design, the faithful old darkie turned his horse's head, and slowly retraced his steps homeward. When he reached the boundary line of his master's place, he dismounted, sat by the road-side, and waited for his return. As soon as Mr. Hunt drove within hearing distance, old Dave arose and stepped into the middle of the road. Here he waved his hand and called: "Hole on marster, please sir!"

There was something in his actions and expression, which struck Lucile and her father with dismay.

"What is the matter, Dave?" asked Mr. Hunt, reining up his horse and turning deathly pale.

"Awful news, marster, awful!" answered the old man, coughing to clear his throat.

Lucile was seized with a sinking fear which froze the blood in her veins.

"Is Herbert Davis any worse?" asked Mr. Hunt; his thoughts naturally reverting to the youth whom he had left in a critical condition the evening before.

"I reckon not, marster, I lef' home early dis morning an' hadn't heard. But we've had dreadful times up home sence you lef'. Dem Yankee gaw-hawkers cum thar las' night and kill poor Zulma!"

"What?" And Mr. Hunt, with a look of horror, glanced at Lucile.

A shriek, almost unearthly, broke from her lips; then followed a succession of cries, so piercing and heart-rending, that her father feared she was going into spasms. He caught her in his arms, and tried to soothe her by endearing words and by reminding her of Herbert, who was now, so sadly in need of her love and sympathy. But it was impossible for her to check the violence of her feelings. The shock of this unexpected misfortune, counterbalanced the fears and griefs which had so unmercifully lacerated her soul since the evening before. In the painful certainty of Zulma's tragic and untimely death, she lost sight of that other contingency so much dreaded and so hopelessly repelled. When the first outburst of grief had exhausted itself, Lucile suddenly subsided into stony silence. The cruel shock she had received, seemed to have crushed or annihilated every emotion. She remained in this passive condition until, leaning on her father's arm, she entered her home. Here, her feelings once more asserted themselves, and she started towards her mother's room, calling her in the most piteous tone. Plaisance who happened to be near, caught Lucile in her arms, just as she reached the fatal spot where Zulma had yielded up her life the night before.

"Oh don't go in dere, *'tite maitresse!*" she cried, in a thrilling voice. "*Bon Dieu!* never go in dat room again, as long as you live. Come wid me—you mus'—me'll take you to yo' mamma!"

It is needless to describe the scene which followed. Mrs. Hunt, who had heroically borne her part in the excitement attending Zulma's death, completely collapsed at the sight of her husband and daughter. She had never fully realized the dangers she had been exposed to, until she felt their protecting arms around her, and listened to their vain regrets for having abandoned her during a time so fraught with danger.

Mr. Hunt and his wife tried to dissuade Lucile from seeing Zulma. "If you take our advice, darling," said her father, "you will always remember her, as you once knew her—full of life and gayety; but if you look on her dead face now, the impression that will be made upon your mind will cling there for years. Dearest child, be guided by those who love you and desire your happiness. We can appreciate your feelings; we understand how hard it is for you to bear it—but 'tis best to submit to our wishes. The sight of her, will unnerve you and make you ill. Spare us the pain and anxiety of such a misfortune, dear Lucile!"

"O Papa!" answered Lucile. "If I were to go to her now and call her, she would answer me, I am sure. She always did Papa—so promptly; and she will now because I know she is not dead—not quite! O mamma; let go my hands let me go to Zulma! I cannot allow them to bury her alive. She does not deserve such a fate. I must see her—and I will!"

With these words, Lucile, with strength born of desperation, broke from her parents' restraining arms, and rushed out in the direction of Zulma's room. Happily, her mother had ordered Plaisance to keep the door locked, at least, until after Lucile had recovered from her first outburst of grief. On reaching the apartment, Lucile threw herself against the door crying: "Zulma! O, Zulma! It is I—Lucile, your little mistress. Wake up—I have come to you to nurse you—to be good to you, dear Zulma. Oh, why don't you answer me? Can't you hear me, Zulma?"

Here she ceased calling, and waited with a look of intense expectation in her wan face, as though listening for some sign within which would revive her sinking, despairing hope. The awful silence which succeeded her passionate pleading,

convinced her how unavailing were her efforts to recall to life that good and faithful creature, who had until now, so willingly responded to her bidding. She clasped her hands over her face, and leaned disconsolately against the unyielding door, giving vent to her feelings in wild heart-breaking sobs. Mrs. Hunt, who had followed her daughter to the back gallery, sank into one of the settees and waited till the overburdened heart had found relief. While sitting here, Eugene Lafitte came up, and spoke to her in an undertone. After a brief and whispered conversation between the two, Mrs. Hunt said: "Lucile here is your cousin waiting to speak to you."

Eugene went to Lucile, put his arm around her drooping form and tenderly kissed her. This was the first time they had met since his return. He had never before kissed her or treated her with such familiarity; but she, in her deplorable state of mind did not seem cognizant of his actions. She raised her streaming eyes to his, and with extraordinary composure asked; "Have you come to tell me that Herbert is dead?"

"No darling;" quickly responded her mother; "Herbert is better and has sent your cousin for you." Lucile disengaged herself from his encircling arms.

"It is useless to try to deceive me, I know Herbert is worse—perhaps dying. You will let me go to him, Mamma? You will not refuse me the consolation of seeing him before he dies."

"Dear Child! we are not deceiving you," said Mrs. Hunt, "Herbert is really better, and I want you to go to him and to stay with Rosanna until—until—"

"Oh; do not say it, Mamma!" cried Lucile, with a deprecating gesture, and a frightened expression in her eyes. "But—it will make no difference—when I return home I shall miss her the more, after you have taken her entirely away."

Then, followed a scene of pathetic farewells. It was with difficulty that Mrs. Hunt tore her daughter away from the door which hid from her sight the remains of one who, though widely separated from her by social laws, had contrived by her unexampled fidelity and disinterestedness to weave around her heart such bonds as seldom unite friends of the same color or social standing.

"Herbert," said Rosanna, entering her brother's room to prepare him for the much desired visit. "Lucile has come. Remember, you promised me not to exert yourself by attempting to hold a conversation with her."

"O, sister!" answered the sufferer, heaving a sigh of relief, "I imagine that her presence alone, will cheer me up and hasten my convalescence. I was so afraid she would refuse to come. Lucile has particular notions, you know."

"Lucile has suffered a good deal since yesterday, both on your account and that of her mother's, who was left alone last night while her father had gone after her. You will find her very much changed, Herbert."

"Poor, dear Lucile!" exclaimed Herbert, in a compassionate voice. "I have been the cause of so much unhappiness to her!—*I*, who should have shielded her from every sorrow! Send her in, sister; I am impatient to see her."

When Lucile entered Herbert's room, she walked towards his bed, and seizing one of his hands, which happened to lay outside of the counterpane, knelt down and bowed her head over it.

"My darling!" cried Herbert, "Stand up; let me look once more into those dear eyes! Come to me Lucile, I can no longer go to you!"

Lucile arose from her knees and stood beside Herbert's pillow, gazing intently on the beloved countenance, now pale and pinched with suffering.

"My own Lucile," Herbert said; pressing her hand to his lips. "You can love and forgive me now, I am such a pitiable object in your eyes."

"Oh! do not say that, Herbert," answered Lucile, wiping the tears which rained down her cheeks. "You are dearer to me now than ever before, I have nothing to forgive; 'tis I who have come to ask your pardon for my seeming heartlessness, for I had forgiven you everything when I received your first letter. I can't account for my conduct towards you dear Herbert. I know I treated you as if I was still angry with you when I was not. It was my false pride which prompted me to do it, but I have suffered enough since yesterday to expiate all my unkindness towards you; believe me, dear Herbert."

"Then you still love me, Lucile?"

"I have never ceased to care for you;" replied Lucile covering her face with her hands to hide her blushes.

"Oh! yes—once darling, when I treated you so outrageously bad. Your love did certainly turn to hatred then; and I deserved that it should."

"I knew that you were laboring under a painful misunderstanding, Herbert. and I was sure you still loved me even in your anger."

"That is true, Lucile, I don't think I could have loved you more than I did at the time I told you that unpardonable falsehood. But—nothing will ever part us again, dearest; nothing but death!" Here the tears dimmed his eyes, and a painful expression overshadowed his face. "And it is possible, that it will, very soon; a person in my predicament; is not very hopeful of his recovery."

A spasm of fear clutched at Lucile's heart, and she turned deadly pale.

Herbert on seeing her emotion, immediately rallied, and said in a more cheerful voice; "Darling, I am too happy to die;

I wish God would spare me for a time, at least, until I prove to you how deeply"—Here he suddenly ceased speaking, an unnatural flush overspread his cheeks, and he put his hand to his side with a suppressed moan.

"Herbert," cried Lucile, in a frightened, agitated voice, "you are exciting yourself. I must really leave you."

"Don't go please, Lucile, I want you to pray for my recovery, I'm sure God will grant you anything you ask. Kneel down here, close to me."

"I will pray for you, with all my heart, Herbert; but you must join your prayers with mine, that they may be more efficacious."

Herbert said he would, but when he turned his eyes in the direction of the bowed head, he forgot his promise, and followed in thought the angelic spirit, he knew had detached itself from earthly surroundings and winged its flight toward the White Throne. When Lucile had ended her prayer she stood for some moments silently contemplating the beloved and altered features of her young friend. She felt her throat tighten and her heart began to heave with conflicting emotions.

"Something is the matter with you, dear heart," said Herbert, anxiously watching the dejected expression on her sweet, pale face. "Tell me what grieves you."

"Well I declare! Herbert," answered Lucile with a pitiful attempt at a smile. "You don't expect me to look cheerful when you are lying here a helpless sufferer, do you?"

"Hardly, if you love me, darling. But you must really cheer up now, I expect to get over this with God's assistance and your fervent prayers. I am feeling so much more light-hearted since you prayed for me."

Herbert once more took possession of Lucile's hands, he pressed them tenderly and reverently to his lips, saying:

"I believe God created us for each other, Lucile. I cannot think of the time when my soul lived apart from yours, or when my heart throbbed without love for you. Can you realize that time dearest!"

"You foolish boy!" said Lucile smiling; "what have we to do with the past?"

"I love you so much my precious darling, that I cannot bear to think of the time when your heart was not mine."

"Herbert I am going," said Lucile with a frown, you have broken your word to Rosanna,"

"I told her you would cure me," he answered, with a happy look in his eyes.

Though Mr. and Mrs. Hunt paid daily visits to Herbert, for a week after his misfortune, they positively refused to allow Lucile to return home with them. One of their motives was, because her presence in the house was a potent element towards Herbert's recovery. He became restless and uncontrollable whenever he suspected Lucile's absence. A mere glimpse of her form at the threshold of his door was sufficient to restore his serenity of mind and brighten up his countenance with deep pleasure. Her parents also wished to see her become somewhat reconciled to the loss of Zulma before permitting her to see the scene of her tragic death. Lucile, on her part, made superhuman efforts to conceal her feelings from Herbert, but she soon discovered that she was despondent and ill at ease, like one nursing some secret sorrow, and forthwith he began racking his brains to ascertain the cause.

One evening, when Mrs. Hunt happened to be sitting alone with him, he turned towards her with a quick, anxious look. "Dear Mrs. Hunt," he said, "I wish to ask you a few questions; I hope you will answer them frankly, I do not say

truthfully, because I know you are incapable of perverting truth."

"Thanks for your good opinion, Herbert," said Mrs. Hunt, with slight hesitancy in her voice; "I will answer any reasonable question you ask me; but I warn you, I will not compromise any one, nor will I tell the truth if it should harm you."

"It is evident that you suspect the nature of my queries," remarked Herbert, turning his face towards the wall with an air of forlorn resignation.

"I give you my word, Herbert, that no special suspicions have crossed my mind."

"You may, after all, relieve my mind of a very painful suspense;" he answered, turning abruptly towards his friend. "Tell me, am I ever to rise from this bed, Mrs. Hunt? I am sure you know, and will tell me the truth. My own family will, naturally, conceal it from me."

"The doctors have pronounced you entirely out of danger, dear Herbert;" answered Mrs. Hunt, with joyful alacrity.

"Then a greater misfortune than *death* confronts me!" exclaimed Herbert, clasping his hands across his breast. "Lucile has ceased to love me—she regrets that she ever plighted me her troth."

Mrs. Hunt stared at the youth with unconcealed amazement. "Are you losing your mind, Herbert? What has put such a notion into your head?"

"Love is not blind," he answered rather impatiently. "I see but too plainly, that Lucile has changed towards me. She is reticent—avoids me even though she knows that her presence is more beneficial to me than all the physic in the world. I know this Mrs. Hunt, because she cannot hide her

feelings from anyone, her nature is as transparent as glass."

"How you misjudge the poor child!" cried Mrs. Hunt, in a faltering voice. "She has had much to contend against all the week. Besides her anxiety for you, she has been laboring under a sad bereavement—the loss of a faithful and devoted friend."

"Oh, Mrs. Hunt, don't tell me that!" cried Herbert, with a terrified expression in his eyes. He fell back upon his pillow, and lay silent and motionless as if stunned by the unexpected announcement. The sound of suppressed weeping aroused him from his momentary surprise. He once more raised himself from his pillow and looked anxiously down upon the bowed head at his bedside.

"Dear Mrs. Hunt," he asked, "tell me for whom you and Lucile are grieving."

Emotion prevented Mrs. Hunt from answering.

"In mercy, relieve me from this painful suspense," pursued Herbert, in great agitation of spirit. "I can endure it no longer. 'What dear friend have you lost. Tell me!'"

"Our good and faithful Zulma," sobbed Mrs. Hunt.

"Zulma! Zulma!" gasped Herbert, "how can it be? I heard her merrily singing, when I passed your house on my way to Fordoche, only a few days ago."

"Her death was very sudden, Herbert," explained Mrs. Hunt, drying her tears; "but you must not expect me to go into the particulars of it to-day. I made up my mind to tell this in order to undeceive you in regard to Lucile's feelings towards you."

"I am one of the most unfortunate beings in God's world!" cried Herbert, clasping his hands to his face; "The most ungrateful, suspicious; and I am utterly unworthy of Lucile's priceless love!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

OVERFLOW AND DISPERSION.

I SHALL pass in silence over a space of eight months and bring my readers on to an epoch when the resources of the Confederacy were at length exhausted, and it stood, bleeding, tottering; its quivering heart laid bare to the final blow that was to end its agony. Unavailing now, was the valor and brilliant deeds of the heroes, who had sealed their principles with their life's blood! Unavailing, the sublime faith and noble perseverance of the patriots, who still wrestled for Freedom on Texan soil! The confident hosts, who had so proudly begun their career at Bethel, were now drifting to their doom towards Appomattox, the Waterloo of Southern Independence!

In Pointe Coupee, a threatened calamity tended to aggravate the deplorable condition of things; a calamity which would be the climax of all the misfortunes brought on by the war, viz: a destructive overflow. Since the emancipation of the slaves, the planters had made no attempt to keep up the levees, and the Federal troops bivouaced behind Morganza, did not seem to realize the danger that menaced them from that quarter. The rise in the waters of the Mississippi was unprecedentedly early in 1865, and the people living in the interior of the country subject to overflows, were for many weeks, harassed by the dreadful fear of being overtaken by the ravaging flood.

The stoniest hearts quaked at the contemplation of the ruin and desolation that would necessarily follow such an occurrence. As spring advanced, the water from tributary streams continued to raise the already booming river and to increase the pressure against the weak and defective levees. Morganza, the largest and most important of these, was the first to succumb to the overwhelming weight of waters. Simultaneously with the break, messengers were dispatched all over the country, carrying the distressful tidings to those who had so long apprehended the catastrophe. There was no time for repining; the people were up and in arms, as it were, against the advancing foe. Their first care was to save their livestock, the only property they could now lay claim to. Their lands could no longer be of any practicable value to them; the impoverished and unsettled state of the country, bereft them of all hopes of rebuilding the levees, and they made up their minds to abandon their plantations to the annual rampage of the Mississippi river.

The news of the crevasse reached Mr. Hunt's neighborhood at a late hour of the night. By dawn the next day, the hands on the place were riding in hot haste over fields and woodland pastures in pursuit of the bewildered cattle which they were to drive out to False River before the bayous became impassable. The poor dumb things went panting and stampeding, filling the air with their mournful bellowings, as though lamenting over the loss of the green meadows and luxuriant cane-brakes, soon to be converted into a waste of waters. Mr. Hunt found ample space and pasturage on his False River plantation to accommodate not only his own stock, but that of his friend's, Mr. Davis. Thirty-six hours after the break, the waters of the Mississippi were rushing from the overflowing banks of bayous across the road and fields, and in less

than a week, they had spread like a pall over the land, confining the families to the narrow limits of their houses. Mr. Hunt was well prepared for the emergency; he had had several skiffs built and a flat boat twenty feet in length. These timely precautions on his part, saved his improvident neighbors from distressing predicaments. Many of the families were caught in a sea of waters, without means of navigation and were entirely dependent on others for the crafts which enabled them to escape from their submerged dwellings. The Hunt residence, as I have before stated, was built on an elevation several feet above the surrounding country; consequently, the water did not reach this point until four days after the breaking of the levee. But, it came eventually, slowly creeping up like some insidious foe, gliding among the beds of blooming flowers, percolating among the roots of the trees and shrubbery. Higher, still higher, rose the invading element: until it swept unchecked, across the lovely grounds, and mingled with the turbulent currents beyond. The roaring of the waters and the incessant thumping of the drift-wood against the flooring and pillars of the house, kept the inmates restless and awake for many a long night. The air was filled with distressing sounds; such as the squealing of hogs on the floating rafts, the bellowing of cattle caught in the flood, and the clatter of the poultry confined in the lofts of out-houses.

Such noises added desolation to the dreariness of the prevailing aspect, and contributed, not a little, to dishearten the overflowed population.

Highland, the home that had seemed so cheerless and empty since poor Zulma's death, was now filled to its utmost capacity with those families who had not had the time or opportunity of escaping before the bridges had been washed away.

The Davis' were cordially welcomed by their hospitable hosts; the prospective alliances between the two families had tended to increase their intimacy, and strengthen the bonds which already united them in close friendship. The mind, instinctively recoils at the approach of adversity; but it has, when once overtaken by it, the happy faculty of overmastering and lifting itself above misfortunes, even when the last vestige of hope has vanished. Thus the people quietly submitted to their lot, as soon as they had recovered from the shock caused by the sudden calamity, and had accustomed themselves to the wide-spread desolation around them. It may have been, that the fathers of large families bewailed, in secret, the loss of their property, and their final banishment from their homes and plantations; but they seldom alluded to their misfortunes or depressed the spirits of the younger members by open manifestations of their feelings. Life, during the time of the high water, was not as wearisome and monotonous as may be supposed. The young folks, especially, were seldom at loss for diversions, and turned every opportunity to the best advantage. The skiff and boat rides over the trackless fields, and visits to their neighbors, was an enjoyable pastime. The fishing parties on the gallery steps, were equal to picnics, and the results were sumptuous meals, when noted dishes were served at little expense. *Bisque*, *Court-bouillon*, and the delicious perch and carp, were daily prepared by adepts in the culinary art.

Herbert, Lucile and Rosanna, now inseparable companions, would "paddle off" on pleasant evenings, to watch the varied effects of the sunsets on the watery expanse. Herbert, who usually assumed control of the rudder, steered the skiff hither and thither, over the rippling waves, his eyes oftener fixed on the sweet, dainty face of the girl he loved, than on the sunlit

waters over which he was expected to rhapsodize when Lucile's beauty, alone, appealed to his artistic sense. There were moments, when Herbert feared, that his love for his betrothed, was idolatrous, and he trembled at the remembrance of the time, he believed himself punished for this same absorbing devotion. He thought to make amends by leading a life more in keeping with the blessings he enjoyed. True, Herbert's piety was not of that spontaneous sort which renders the service of God easy and persuasive; but there was a natural congruity between the uprightness of his soul, and the sentiments which gratitude and sense of his dependency on the Deity, awakened in his bosom. He had as yet, never lost sight of the good resolutions he had taken during that spell of illness which came so near terminating his youthful career.

It was now two weeks since the breaking of Morganza. Mr. Hunt's intention was to move his family to False River, as soon as the velocity of the current had sufficiently abated to render navigation safe and easy. This was the decision of all the planters in his section of the country. They were compelled to abandon their places; they had no other alternative, as there was no longer any security from overflows. Mr. Dawsey had already moved to one of the parishes on the east side of the Mississippi; and Mr. Davis was making preparations to return to his native hills. Such changes necessitated the separation of the young lovers, who seemed to have become more fondly attached to each other, since the last fortnight of close and blissful companionship. Lucile was not of a character to make an exhibition of her feelings. She suffered, but none detected her grief, except those who intuitively felt it and responded to it. Herbert and her mother watched and recognized the signs of her struggle. There was a suggestion of repressed tears in her dark violet eyes, and when

ever she smiled, her pretty lips turned in woeful little curves at the corners. These affecting marks of Lucile's sorrow and love for him, filled Herbert with conflicting emotions, rendering him, by turns, the happiest and the most miserable of mortals. He had fallen into the habit of spending long sleepless hours at night, pondering on his hard destiny. The war was fast coming to an end, and with its close came the final pecuniary perplexities of the Southern planters. What prospects had he now of acquiring a profession. His father had promised to send him back to the University of Mississippi, in order to pass through a course of civil engineering, but the exercises of that institution had been suspended, and there was little hope of him resuming his studies elsewhere. The money his father had paid for his Grosse Tete land, and spent in the purchase of the slaves, was irretrievably lost; moreover, he was under the necessity of procuring another home for his family. Mindful of these facts, Herbert had in the early part of the year devised a plan which would enable him to procure the funds necessary to pay for the completion of his education. Half of his father's place had been abandoned for the want of laborers. With the assistance of a couple of hired hands, Herbert undertook to plant a cotton crop on this land. The hope of selling the staple at the prevailing prices, stimulated his courage and filled his bosom with enthusiasm. His energy was in proportion to the prospect which opened before him. His ambition was, not only to realize a sum sufficient to defray his school expenses, but also, a surplus which would enable him to make a start in life. It was not customary at that time, for the sons of planters to lower themselves by manual labor. Herbert had to contend against popular opinion, as well as the hardships incident to his daring and laudable enterprise. Happily, he was of that

high-toned, independent character which feared no reproach save that of his conscience, and he persevered in his work until his designs, as we have seen, were frustrated by the untimely overflow. But he quickly rallied after his disappointment, and began building up new plans by which he might aspire to a still higher calling than the one his father had previously chosen for him. As yet, his prospects were still edged in by unsurmountable obstacles, and there was nothing for him to do but make the best of the time which intervened between his recent enjoyment and the painful separation from his beloved Lucile.

One day, Herbert and Lucile had undertaken to pack in large wooden boxes, a lot of books which were to be sent out with part of the furniture to the old plantation. The family were to follow on the next trip of the flat-boat. The task was a sad one to the young people. They were breaking, as it were, one by one, the tendrils which bound their hearts to these objects of their mutual affections. Many of the familiar volumes passing through their hands, were associated either with their happy childhood, or with that sweeter time when each felt drawn towards the other by the subtle, uncontrollable attraction which the heart has no power to resist. Here were Scott's works, the first novels they were allowed to read. Macauley, Goldsmith, Dickin's Hawthorne; the sight of each awoke some tender, responsive chord of memory's lyre. Some times, they turned over the leaves of the books, searching for favorite passages, or for such as once appeared too profound for their comprehension, in order to test the actual development of their minds. Herbert opened at random, Pope's Essay on "Man." "Lucile," he asked, "do you remember what a time we had trying to analyze this passage: 'Know thyself, presume not on God to scan?'"

"Indeed, I do," answered Lucile, raising to him her thoughtful eyes; "and I remembered how you dared to assist me out of my embarrassment. You were always kind and considerate towards me, Herbert; always my champion ever since I was a child."

Herbert's face flushed most painfully.

"I wish I had *always* been good to you, Lucile;" he said, turning aside to hide his confusion. "The thought of my outrageous folly and injustice towards you, will forever burn in my memory and keep my heart in a state of wholesome contrition."

"O, Herbert!" cried Lucile, with a deprecating gesture; "hush! but I am thinking," continued she, glancing up at Herbert, who now earnestly met her gaze from his perch on the step ladder; "that our little misunderstanding has, after all, been productive of much happiness to two people whom we both dearly love. Has it not been the direct cause of bringing together Rosanna and Cousin Eugene? He never would have returned to the parish, had you not insisted on his coming home with you."

"And I *never* would have invited him had we not had a falling out," exclaimed Herbert, with a glad light in his fine eyes. "We have not suffered in vain, dearest. Our own love for each other has been strengthened by the ordeal, and the life-long happiness of our friend and relative has occurred from an incident, we once thought had forever ruined our own prospects. Your reflection has removed a great weight from my mind, and has made me so happy, I've a notion to step down and kneel at your feet in humble acknowledgement of the benefit you have conferred upon me."

"Don't make yourself ridiculous, Herbert;" Lucile protested, with a pathetic attempt at gayety. "Hand me the books, quick! this is no time for jesting."

"Pray, do not hurry me!" pleaded Herbert, quietly leaning against the shelves of the book-case. "I'm trying to prolong this job 'till evening. You seem to forget what will be the result of the final packing up of these household treasures. Have you thought of the meaning of it all, my darling?"

"Oh, yes I have!" wailed Lucile in broken accents. "It means everything sad and discourging, Herbert; the severing of ties between old friends, the breaking up of our dear, beautiful home, and an eternal farewell to Grosse Tete. We must give up the old life and all its pleasant associations; the flowers, our little '*Vale of Tempe*,' and the dear old cabin home where we spent so many happy days together." Lucile here buried her face in her hands like one overcome by the pressure of emotion. In a thrice, Herbert was by her side, struggling to unclasp the little hands which eclipsed the light of her beautiful eyes. "Lucile, darling!" he cried, "look up! things are not as bad as you imagine. The changes which overtake us here cannot long or materially effect *our* prospects in life. Very soon, we shall create a little world of our own; and if you care for me as much as I do for *you*, my own Lucile, we shall find happiness in whatever situation we are thrown. What is there to fear? Am I not strong and hopeful? I only wish I had greater obstacles to surmount, that I might prove to you how dearly I love you and how much I would dare for your sake." The captured hands had ceased to flutter and lay confidently in his.

"Herbert," asked Lucile, turning to him her flower-like face, "have I ever mistrusted you?"

"O, Lucile! I hope not. Why do you ask?"

"Because you persist in saying things which imply your lack of confidence in regard to my sentiments towards you."

“Then, I shall correct myself of the foolish habit;” rejoined Herbert, a glad expression flitting across his handsome countenance. “My *actions alone* shall hereafter prove my deathless love for you; and some of these days, I mean to make you feel proud of the name I am going to give you; it will not be difficult to win fame, if you be my Cynosure, dearest Lucile.”

CONCLUSION.

The rest of this story is soon told.

Immediately after the close of the war, a friend of Mr Davis' secured for Herbert a fine situation in New Orleans. Here, he was thrown in daily intercourse with a set of energetic and intelligent youths, who, like himself, were struggling to make their mark in the world. Closing his heart against the allurements of the city life, he devoted every hour of his leisure time to storing his mind with useful knowledge and in accumulating the funds which would materially aid him in the acquirement of an honorable profession. With very little assistance, he pursued a course in higher mathematics, and methodically read such standard works as he knew would tend to invigorate his mind and prepare him to take a literary course in some Southern university.

In the Summer of 1866, Mr. Hunt received a letter from his mother announcing the death of his aged father, and giving sad details of the havoc wrought during the war in his native valley and in the immediate neighborhood of his old home. His mother's bereavement, her losses and tender solicitude on his own account, strongly appealed to his compassion and filled his heart with a longing to look on her face once more, and to revisit the familiar scenes of his happy boyhood. He never expected to return to Grosse Tete. The delapidated condition of the old homestead on False River, its dreary aspect and melancholy memories, rendered it an undesirable place of residence. He, therefore, made up his mind to leave

his property in the hands of an agent and to take his family to Virginia to live. No people in the world are as fondly attached to their homes as the Creoles are; Mr. Hunt was aware that his wife was no exception to the rule. The fear of broaching the subject to her, cost him many anxious hours. He managed, however, to bring it about in a manner the least shocking to her sensitive heart. Though the tears rushed to her sorrowful eyes, and her bosom heaved with convulsive emotions, she uttered no word of protest, and submitted to her husband's wishes with that sweetness of disposition which showed her full confidence in his superior judgment, and her appreciation of the motives which prompted him to return to his native state.

In the Spring of the following year Mr. Hunt completed his arrangements to leave the parish, and to bid adieu to the scenes which had been so pleasantly associated with his early enterprises and happy married life.

The family's last visit was to the ancient cemetery at Saint Francis' Church, where the dear unforgotten dead slept beneath the murmuring pines. Lucile and her mother brought the loveliest flowers from the old garden, and tearfully strewed them upon the Lafitte tomb. Lucile then sought a grave at some distance off in the rear of the church yard, and laid a chaplet of pansies upon a marble slab bearing this simple inscription:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF

“ Z U L M A . ”

1864.

She gazed long and sorrowfully on the familiar name, enwreathed in gold and purple flowers. She seemed to look

down, into a vista of years, when Life was but a joyful ramble among trailing vines and lily-fringed bayous. She almost fancied she heard the far off monotonous songs of the field-hands—and then Zulma's clear, melodious voice drifting towards her in farewell echoes. Her eyes had looked their last on the vanished scenes of her childhood; a sigh, deep as a sob, broke from her sweet tremulous mouth.

The touch of her father's affectionate arm about her waist, ended her sad reverie.

"Come darling," he said, "we must reach the landing in time for the 'Lee;' she will not wait for us; he added with a meaning smile, "nor will Herbert brook a disappointment."

One of Nannie Dawsey's epistles to a Grosse Tete friend, will give further tidings of the characters familiar to our reader.

Magnolia Retreat, June 28, 1868.

My Dear Laura:

Much obliged for the kind invitation to your wedding; if I had half a chance, I'd run over—but you see I'm yoked to a widower with four children, and have my hands full. I never would have married him if he hadn't fought during the entire war and lost an arm in the good cause. But his misfortune doesn't, in the least interfere with my peace of mind. I'm as happy as a lark, and am trying to do my duty towards his motherless boys. Well, I must say that the *matrimonial* fever is raging among us young folks. Only last week I got a Winchester paper giving an account of the marriage of Lucile and Herbert. It must have been a *dandy* affair. The happy couple are spending their honeymoon "visiting historic battle fields;" I say—following up the war trails, I should not wonder if Lucile puts out her beautiful eyes weeping over fallen braves.

Besides the Winchester paper, I received their wedding card and a letter from Mrs. Hunt. She writes that Herbert has adopted the law as a profession. After he left New Orleans, he took a course in the law department of some university; (forget which,) any way, he learned enough to start on his own hook. He is of a serious turn of mind, and chuck full of ambition. He means to take a straight cut for Washington. I predict he'll get there some of these fine mornings.

Mrs. Hunt inquires very kindly about all her old neighbors, and sends regards to all whom I may meet. She is a sweet, friendly creature, not half as stuck up as that precious daughter of hers. I don't think Lucile ever forgave me for a little joke I once played on her. Mrs. Hunt writes, that they sold their False River plantation the year after they moved to Virginia, and that the curious old ramshackle house on it has been torn down to make room for less imposing buildings. What a pity! 'twas such a jolly old place for ghosts!

No; I haven't heard from Rosanna since her marriage. All I know about her is, that Mr. Lafitte took her to his home at Dangerfield, Titus county, Texas. My gracious! what a scatteration we've had since the overflows. A bombshell exploding in our midst couldn't have dispersed us as neat. I don't suppose we'll ever get together again, nor have such good times as we had on dear, rough and tumble old Grosse Tete.

By the way, I was real sorry to learn that the lovely Hunt residence at Highland had been burnt to the ground. I think there should be a law passed, prohibiting hunters to camp in peoples vacant houses. Pa says Mr. Hunt's agent ought to stand responsible for the damage done. He has his own private reasons for saying so, our own lovely shanty out there, isn't fire-proof you know.

Pa is still hankering after the flesh-pots of Egypt; and watching the papers to see if somebody hasn't started to rebuild the levees. His normal condition is that of a crab apple, and he swears awfully at times. He says he would rather live six months on a raft on Grosse Tete and take the chances of making a crop after the water than to stay here coaxing cotton out of sand. If it wasn't for Ma and me he'd be back there now, but my goodness! what pleasure will there be floundering in the water all spring like ever so many frogs and crocodiles. As long as Pa had the darkies to growl at, there was room for comfort, but for want of better he pours his vials of wrath upon his nearest and dearest, and that's poor mother.

Now Laura, I've written you quite a respectable letter, and I hope you'll return the compliment.

I remain as ever your devoted friend.

Nannie.

For thirty years the population in the alluvial parishes built and patched their levees, but with practically no benefit, their means being inadequate to so vast an undertaking. In the meantime the River Commission and distinguished engineers discussed their respective theories on a problem which took them a quarter of a century to solve. The levee system has been subsequently adopted as our only safeguard against floods, and the work of construction aided by the government's liberal appropriations, has been prosecuted to completion. These superb embankments crowning the shores from one end of the State to the other, seem to bid eternal defiance to the Father of Waters. The people in the valley have every reason to hope that they have seen the last of those terrible overflows which have been harassing and impoverishing them since the War. That particular section of the country described in the foregoing chapters, had until recent years been

abandoned to almost annual inundations. The once flourishing plantation known as "Highland," has been year after year revolving into its primitive state. The silent phenomena of Nature are steadily rebuilding a forest as wild and dense, as that leveled by the axes of slaves some forty years ago. Thickets and briars riot over the grounds where fairest of flowers, once perfumed the air. Trees which stood in symmetrical array about the stately home, now wearily clasp their mossy limbs above its ashes. The sediment carried by the water, has partially filled some of the important bayous, and the action of the currents has washed away and depressed the surface of that point of land which once suggested the name of the place. The buildings have all been demolished—not a ruin remains whereon a Marius may sit and ponder on the vicissitudes of Time and Fortune.

Once again the tide of immigration turns to Grosse Tete, and settlements are crowding up, close to Highland, the finest tract of land on "the Bayou," but it remains *intact*, consecrated by its owner to the olden memories still clustering around it.

THE END.





